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Monday, 9 July 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Löfven/Mr. Skoog/Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djedje
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Ms. Wever-Croes
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465)

Letter dated 21 June 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/625)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: I should like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Security Council, to pay tribute to His Excellency Mr. Vassily Nebenzia, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, for his service as President of the Council for the month of June. I am sure I speak for all members of the Security Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Nebenzia and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

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The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Ministers and other representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence underscores the importance of the subject matter we will discuss today. Before each member is a list of speakers who have requested to take the floor in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice of the Council in this regard. We propose that they be invited to participate in today's meeting.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in today's meeting: Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund; and Ms. Yenny Londoño, civil society representative.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/465, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. I wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/625, which contains a letter dated 21 June 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/667, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by 95 Member States. The full list of sponsors of the draft resolution will be reflected in the official record of today's meeting.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2427 (2018).

I now give the floor to Ms. Gamba.

Ms. Gamba: On behalf of the Secretary-General, who is currently attending the African Union-United Nations annual conference in Addis Ababa, I would like to thank Sweden and its Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Stefan Löfven, for taking the initiative to hold today's debate. In my own capacity, I would also like to also thank Sweden for its exceptional role as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed conflict and its dedicated support for the children-and-armed-conflict mandate. I also want to thank my close partners, in particular, UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and civil society.

This is the second time I have had the honour to address the Security Council in the Chamber on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. Over the course of these past 13 months, I have had the opportunity to follow first hand the outstanding work undertaken by child-protection actors on the ground. These dedicated men and women are at the forefront of documenting, addressing and preventing grave violations against children in some of the most difficult conditions imaginable. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for their commitment.

Notwithstanding their efforts, I am profoundly shocked by the appalling number of grave violations perpetrated against children last year. Over 21,000 violations were documented by the United Nations, representing a significant increase over the previous year. Each and every one of these violations led to unspeakable suffering for children, families and entire communities. The majority of these despicable acts were perpetrated by armed groups, although Government forces and unknown armed actors played an important part.

A sharp rise in the number of abductions, coinciding with increased levels of recruitment and use of both girls and boys, was of particular concern. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab abducted over 1,600 children by threatening entire communities or targeting schools as places for recruitment. Surges in violence also resulted in elevated numbers of children killed or injured, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and Myanmar, while Boko Haram in Nigeria and neighbouring countries continued to attack both military and civilian targets by using children to perpetrate suicide attacks.

Schools and hospitals continued to be directly targeted or were damaged as a result of indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas, denying tens of thousands of children access to education and health care. Similarly, broad-based denials of humanitarian access and attacks on humanitarian convoys and personnel cut off children from essential aid, thereby further increasing their vulnerability.

I am also concerned that children allegedly associated with armed groups, particularly those using tactics of extreme violence, continued to be detained in harsh conditions, often without charge and for extended periods. While those responsible for grave violations must be held to account, we also must not forget that children who have been recruited should be treated primarily as victims and that detention should be used only as a last resort and for the shortest period of time. I feel strongly that rehabilitation and reintegration — and not retribution — must be the centrepiece of our efforts when engaging with recruited girls and boys.

Urgent action is needed to address those issues if we want to live up to our legal and moral responsibilities. Recent commitments by parties to conflict are a source of hope in that regard. Action plans were adopted in the Central African Republic, Mali and Nigeria. The full implementation of its action plan by the Government of the Sudan and the advances in the protection of children attained through the peace process in Colombia are testament to what we can achieve when political will and international support coincide. The Government of Iraq set out to develop an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces, and the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen established a child-protection unit at its headquarters. The ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict by the Government of the Central African Republic in 2017 moved us one country closer to universal ratification.

Specific Member State initiatives, such as the ministerial conference organized by France to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Paris Principles and Commitments, the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration by 15 States last year and the adoption of the Vancouver Principles, continued to shine a spotlight on the protection of children affected by armed conflict and catalyse support for this important agenda. I firmly believe that we must build on those advances to move to an era of prevention.

Failing to assume this collective responsibility not only puts boys and girls at risk but may also reduce societies' ability to overcome conflict and to build peace. Preventing violations against children must therefore be an integral part of any strategy to reach and sustain peaceful settlements.

In that regard, I am happy to announce that, following presidential statement S/PRST/2017/21, adopted by the Council during last year's open debate (see S/PV.8082), my Office commenced a consultative process with United Nations partners to compile good practices and develop practical guidance on integrating child protection issues into peace processes. I am glad to benefit from the support of the Government of Sweden in that regard, for which I would like to thank Prime Minister Löfven.

The tools that will be developed as the result will aim at enhancing our ability to mainstream children's issues in such processes to give early guarantees for the protection and reintegration of children, which may also serve to build confidence between negotiating parties. I am also encouraged by the process undertaken by the Government of the Sudan to develop a broad national strategy to prevent grave violations against children, building on the gains of its action plan. Replicating that initiative with Governments, as well as regional and subregional actors, is a promising strategy to foster a child-protection architecture focused on prevention and ensure common approaches and standards.

Finally, resolution 2427 (2018), adopted by the Council just a few minutes ago, provides child-protection actors with political space to engage parties to conflict at an early stage, and is thus a milestone in our common journey to make violations against children a thing of the past.

Moving towards an era of prevention also requires the provision of adequate resources. Over 10,000 children were formally released from armed forces or groups last year, while over 12,000 children affected by conflict were reached by reintegration support provided by UNICEF and partners. Those 12,000 boys and girls have been given an opportunity to overcome their traumatic past and become forces for peace within their communities.

However, many children formerly associated with parties to conflict left those parties through informal pathways. They often live in a state of heightened vulnerability and are in urgent need of support. We must ensure that actors in the field are provided with predictable, sustained and flexible funding to enable them to react to immediate reintegration needs and sustain those efforts. I am currently working with UNICEF and other child-protection actors to further promote this idea. The Council will hear today from Yenny Londoño about her experiences with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo and about her general views on reintegration needs from their standpoint.

Equally, there is a need to continue prioritizing child-protection capacity in order to translate resources and opportunities into results, including by requesting adequate capacity in the mandates of relevant peace operations. In that regard, I am encouraged that regional actors, such as the African Union and NATO, have strengthened their child-protection capacity. I look forward to engaging with other regional and subregional organizations over the course of the coming months to strengthen child-protection frameworks.

Finally, the level and severity of violations that fill the pages of the latest annual report (S/2018/465) of the Secretary-General serve as a reminder that we must work in unison to change the tide of history. We cannot further jeopardize our most precious resource through inaction, but must increase our efforts to develop preventive tools, utilize reintegration strategically to break cycles of violence and address the cross-border nature of violations through increased cooperation.

I began my statement by painting a grim picture of several conflict situations — and I could have mentioned many more. Yet we must not leave the Chamber today in despair. The resolution adopted today is a further step in strengthening the framework of child protection provided by the Council, which has given us the tools to engage in ways that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. Our capacity to jointly put those tools to work will decide the fate of thousands of children, and ultimately whether we are able to move closer to ending forever the use and abuse of children in, and for, armed conflict.

The President: I thank Ms. Gamba for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Fore.

Ms. Fore: I appreciate the steadfast commitment of the members of the Security Council to the plight of children affected by armed conflict around the world. Today, one in every four children lives in a country affected by conflict or disaster. Like the statistics detailed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465), one in every four children is a number almost beyond comprehension — almost, until you meet, as I have, the children and young people whose lives are being shattered by conflicts, for example in Yemen, Mali and South Sudan; the children who are malnourished and sick, at risk of being maimed or killed by a landmine or by delivered attacks on schools and hospitals; vulnerable to gender-based violence; recruited to fighting; losing hope not only in their futures but in the futures of their countries.

UNICEF is sparing no effort to support these children. In Iraq, for example, we reached 1.3 million children on the move with life-saving supplies like water and ready-to-eat rations, and almost 400,000 with psychosocial support last year. In South Sudan, we reached 780,000 children under the age of five with health, nutrition, water and sanitation for health, education and protection services. With our partners, we are also making progress in releasing children from armed groups and armed forces and supporting their reintegration. Last year, 12,000 children were reintegrated into their communities. For example, in the Central African Republic about 3,000 children received interim care, psychosocial support and family reunification services. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF worked with partners to release and reintegrate over 3,200 children from armed groups, and so far this year 806 children have been released from armed forces and groups in South Sudan and are receiving reintegration services.

Our work must continue. Last year saw 21,000 verified violations against children — a dramatic increase from the year before — more children killed or maimed; more young survivors of rape; more recruited to the fighting; more abducted. And these are just the verified numbers. Our teams on the ground know that the number of violations is in fact much higher.

As a global community, we must ask ourselves what will become of these young lives in both the short and long terms. In the short term, children's lives are in immediate danger not only from the violence itself, but also as basic services collapse. In Yemen, I visited hospitals staffed by workers who have nOt been paid in two years; where there are not enough respirators and medicine to go around; where mothers hold their frail, acutely malnourished children; where psychosocial workers counsel terrified children about the horrors they have witnessed and remembered.

These immediate costs of conflict come with long-term consequences. If we fail to prevent violations against children today, we fail to prevent violence against children tomorrow. Today's children will grow up to see violence and conflict as normal, acceptable and inevitable. We need only think of the children who have grown up knowing nothing but war. In his lifetime, a seven-year old Syrian child has never known a peaceful Syria; an Afghan teenager has never known a peaceful Afghanistan. And let us consider what the children of South Sudan have endured — and continue to endure — as they mark their country's seventh year of independence today. How can we prepare children to shape peaceful futures if they do not know what peace even looks like?

As we renew our call on these conflicts to stop, we also call for zero tolerance of all violations against children — violations that fuel grievances that enflame and perpetuate conflicts across generations; violations like attacks on hospitals and schools, which is why we call again on States to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration; violations like the deliberate targeting of children, which must stop; and violations like detaining children for associating with armed groups or armed forces. We commend the Council's strong resolution 2427 (2018) — proposed by Sweden — on this issue. Too often, these children are locked up with adults and without legal representation, due process or contact with family members, all of which is contrary to international humanitarian and human rights law.

Progress is possible. Just today, the Nigerian army released 183 children — 175 boys and 8 girls — to UNICEF's care. These children had been detained for alleged association with Boko Haram. Today's action was the result of intense effort and engagement for their release. As we work for many more children to be released, we must also support these young lives as they reintegrate into their communities. Stigma is often the single biggest barrier. As we reintegrate a child into a community, we face difficult questions. How does a community view a boy who was part of a raid that killed a member of that community, or a girl who was abducted or abused by an armed group and has never been to school? We must invest in local solutions that address community fears and concerns, while giving these children the chance at a normal life that they deserve, including through quality education, training in life skills and work skills and psychosocial support.

We also believe that child protection and upholding children's rights are a fundamental part of any peace process, which is why we welcome the Council's recent request to launch a process to compile guidance and best practices on weaving children's rights into peace negotiations. In the Philippines, for example, over the past decade UNICEF has worked closely with commanders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to release more than 1,850 children from its ranks and begin the process of reintegrating them into their communities. This includes raising awareness with commanders and community members to end recruitment and provide support, education and family-intervention plans for the released. This process not only led to the group's de-listing in the Secretary General's 2017 report (S/2017/821); most importantly, it helped restart peace negotiations and it helped restart young lives.

In Mali, children themselves are becoming agents of peace in their communities and raising awareness of the rights that every child has to protection, education, birth registration and health. Last year, UNICEF trained 310 children as Peace Ambassadors who go door to door in vulnerable communities to promote dialogue, peacebuilding and the importance of keeping children and young people — especially girls — in school. And this year, as part of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, we have helped train 2,500 young people to promote peace in pastoral and farming communities through local meetings, debates, radio broadcasts and social media. These are two examples of how children and young people are not just passive recipients of peace and reconciliation efforts, but how they can lead them.

But as conflicts increase in number and ferocity, thousands of children are slipping through our safety nets worldwide. Civilians and communities are being targeted on a scale not seen since the Second World War. Consequences for violations are small, if they are imposed at all.

As most major conflicts are driven and perpetuated by political conflict, addressing them demands building political will — political will to increase resources to reach children and young people with the support they need, and build the human capital that every society needs to shape a resilient and sustainable future; political will to end to violations against children now; political will for all parties to conflict to adhere to humanitarian law and principles, not as a distant, utopian dream but as a practical and necessary pathway to a better future; and most of all, political will to end these conflicts, urgently, and to place peace first by placing children first.

When faced with the escalating consequences of conflict to a generation of children who have never known peace, we — All of us — have a duty to act for the children and for the future of our world. Once again, I thank the Council for the opportunity to shine a light on this important issue. I look forward to its deliberations.

The President: I thank Ms. Fore for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Londoño.

Ms. Londoño (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I am grateful for the opportunity that the Security Council has given us to participate in such an important forum. I express special thanks go to the Government of Sweden, which invited us and helped us travel from Colombia, as well as to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

I am speaking in the first person plural as I am representing the Group of Young Consultants on Childhood, Adolescence and Armed Conflict, and I am also speaking on behalf of children and adolescents who are tragically experiencing recruitment and exploitation by armed groups and grave violations of their rights in various parts of the world.

Under the slogan "Our Voices Count", the Group of Young Consultants was spawned by an initiative of the civil society organization Benposta and relies on the support of the European Union, which has joined in recognizing, supporting and encouraging other organizations, such as Oxfam International, Humanidad Vigente and the Coalition Against Involving Children in Armed Conflict in Colombia and the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict in New York. In my particular case, I joined the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) at the age of 13. I cut ties with the latter in very strange circumstances after having seen combat, and subsequently went through various programmes. Today I am pursuing a law degree and I am currently in my ninth semester. In 2014, I had the opportunity to travel to Havana and participate as a victim of recruitment in a delegation at talks between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP.

I am grateful to the countries represented in the Chamber for their representatives' willingness to listen, as my message is mainly addressed to States, which are responsible for developing and implementing policies aimed at the prevention and protection of children and adolescents.

As the Secretary-General states in his recent report,

> "Preventing violations against children affected by conflict should be a primary concern

> of the international community ... We must do more to address this challenge by ensuring that child protection is made an integral part of any comprehensive strategy to prevent and resolve conflict in view of enabling sustainable peace and by promoting the close involvement of children during the development of such strategies." (*S/2018/465, para. 11*)

In that regard, I am speaking as an advocate for the following recommendations.

It is essential that the root causes that compelled us to join such groups be resolved, as most of our pasts have been marked by the violation of our rights, including access to education, health care, housing, employment, our families' livelihoods, security, participation in cultural life and sports and recreation, among others. We are deeply concerned that the failure to change the social and economic conditions of our families and communities seriously hinders our social integration, thereby giving way to our constant temptation to rejoin those groups. We therefore underscore that the best way to prevent the recruitment of children is by guaranteeing their rights on the ground. Similarly, Governments must ensure the relevant security conditions to protect our physical, personal and psychological integrity. Unfortunately, many children who have disassociated themselves from such groups are currently facing problems, including the threats that they receive when they return to their local areas, and, often times, institutional support from the Government is scarce or non-existent.

It is also essential that, in the various phases of the process of reintegration, we be given the opportunity to express our opinion and decide our lives, thereby ensuring our participation in developing and implementing public policies related to our rights. Educational programmes involving psychological support, skills acquisition and comprehensive training must consider our particularities and include a gender and ethnic approach that allows us to exercise our right to integration, social inclusion, education and housing, among others, in decent conditions, while respecting our professional aspirations.

It is important to address the specific needs of girls in developing reintegration programmes, given that the way in which we are affected is different from that of boys. It must be remembered that, in terms of reintegration, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to every case. We also recommend that our families be included and, in as much as possible, participate in the reintegration process, while trying to repair, rebuild and strengthen the bonds between them and the community.

It is worrisome that schools and educational centres are being affected and/or occupied by armed actors, thereby seriously affecting the learning process of children and their and their teachers and professors' physical integrity. In that regard, we ask Governments that have not yet signed the Safe Schools Declaration to do so, and we have been waiting on a deferred response from Colombia, among other countries, since 2015.

We call on Governments to fulfil their commitments regarding children and adolescents, including their right to be treated as victims and thereby entitled to full reparations. In situations of conflict, when they are implicated in the actions of armed groups, many children are treated as delinquents and are unable to acquire the status of crime victims and included in Government protection programmes for children. On the contrary, we wind up in detention centres. It is worth highlighting that Colombia has enacted the victims law, which constitutes an advanced and sophisticated legal framework for the protection of victims. That framework can contribute to the exchange of good practices and lessons learned among countries that face similar problems so as to ensure that all children are treated primarily as victims.

Lastly, concerning full reparations, unfortunately, several of our colleagues, after having left the group more than 10 years ago and been acknowledged as disassociated from it, have yet to receive the resources due to them within the framework of the victims law in Colombia. It is therefore important that all State actors uphold their commitments with regard to children and adolescent victims at risk. If that is not done, their life ambitions will be seriously affected. In addition, they will be revictimized and remain at risk.

Once again, we are grateful that the voice of children and adolescent victims of armed conflict has been heard in this forum, and we hope that they will be considered. We ask that Governments not see us as a problem, but provide us with an opportunity to demonstrate to them our proactive abilities, embodied by such entities as the Group of Young Consultants in Colombia and what we are doing. I want to underscore the happiness that I feel in sharing with everyone present the experience that I underwent for 13 years during my association with the FARC-EP. The reality is that many of us live in very remote areas in which there is no State presence, and therefore run the risk of undergoing such experiences. It is not fair for children to be seen as a sacrifice or crime, rather than as a hope for the future. Given that I am currently pregnant, I think I have the additional responsibility of changing both my world and my daughter's, so that she can live in a better world. While that is my responsibility, I believe that everyone here has the tools to help shape the lives other children who do not have a voice.

The President: I thank Ms. Londoño for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Prime Minister of Sweden.

First, I would like to thank Special Representative Gamba and Executive Director Fore for their important, and at times difficult-to-listen-to, briefings to the Security Council. Let me also thank Yenny Londoño for sharing her inspirational story and adequate demands.

Childhood is not just the start of our life, it is the foundation of it. It is the base from which we reach our full potential and the base for peaceful and prosperous societies. Put simply, ensuring the care, safety and protection of children today prevents conflicts tomorrow.

Yet we are not doing nearly enough to protect our children. Approximately 350 million children are affected by armed conflict today. They are at risk of being killed, or maimed. They are at risk of becoming victims of sexual violence. They are at risk of having no other school than what war teaches them: loss, fear, hatred and revenge.

While the need to do more is clear, our concerted efforts are having an effect. Over the past two decades, 130,000 children have been released from armed groups. In the last two years, more than 12,000 children received United Nations assistance for reintegration. With today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) we not only strengthen the children and armed conflict agenda more broadly, but we also further the prevention agenda. Let me highlight a few ways by which that is done.

First, children's needs are often overlooked when peace is negotiated. Indeed, universal concern for children may sometimes open the door to finding new solutions. Today's resolution emphasizes how the children and armed conflict agenda is integral to conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

Secondly, the resolution sets out a framework for the reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups. Successful reintegration is in the best interest of the child, but also in the best interest of societies. The resolution places children as part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Thirdly, the resolution recognizes that access for all girls and boys to education and health care, including mental health, in conflict is essential. Also, for the first time, the resolution distinguishes between girls and boys and makes the point that their needs and vulnerabilities are different.

Fourthly, the resolution links the children and armed conflict agenda to the Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we can leave no child behind.

Fifthly, for the first time in a Council resolution, it states the central principle that children in armed conflict should be treated primarily as victims.

Sixthly, the resolution stresses accountability for all violations and abuses against children — not just the gravest crimes — thereby setting a new standard for the prevention of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. There can be no exceptions to humanity, and there can be no exceptions to international humanitarian law.

Finally, the resolution addresses the need to also consider the views of children. We must listen to children and hear their perspectives, as well as their proposals for solutions. In that vein, Sweden, together with UNICEF and civil society partners, organized a series of child consultations around the world focusing on children as refugees and agents for peace, as well as the reintegration of former child soldiers. We also organized consultations in Sweden. All that resulted in recommendations where the messages from children to us, as decision makers, are clear: provide security and safety; put food on the table; ensure education; provide care for the sick or injured; and, above all else, end war.

We have agreed on today's resolution; now we must implement it. Special Representative Gamba is working with partners to develop practical guidance and tools to integrate child protection issues into peace processes. Our responsibility for us in the Council is to consider the effect of conflict on children in all our work and in the renewal of mission mandates by ensuring every mission has child protection advisers and by including children's perspectives in our discussions.

I can think of no better way to address the root causes of conflict than by giving children a loving and safe childhood and protecting them from the scourge of war. It is up to us to live up to our responsibilities and to deliver on the children's demands. It is up to us to prevent the conflicts of tomorrow by protecting children today.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Prime Minister of Aruba, Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Ms. Wever-Croes (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, as well as with the statement to be made by the Permanent Representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their briefings. I would like to say thank Ms. Yenny Londoño for reminding us that today's debate is not only about shocking numbers and trends. Indeed, behind the statistics are real-life individuals who can be empowered to make a change in real-life situations.

Allow me to highlight three elements today: first, the erosion of international humanitarian law and the imperative of accountability; secondly, the vital importance of child protection in conflict prevention and sustaining peace; and, thirdly, the importance of strong tools for an effective, credible and transparent children and armed conflict mandate.

First, at last year's open debate on children and armed conflict (see S/PV.8082), the Kingdom of the Netherlands expressed concern at the increased lack of respect for international humanitarian law, and we do so again today. The 30 per cent increase in grave violations as identified under the children and armed conflict mandate in 2017 is shocking. Together we must do everything in our power to immediately turn the tide of the erosion in respect for international humanitarian law. That also includes commitments to binding instruments, such as the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to non-legally binding commitments such as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Resolution 2427 (2018), which we adopted today, calls on all States to put an end to impunity for the most horrendous crimes perpetrated against children. Importantly, it highlights the contribution of the International Criminal Court in holding to account those responsible for the most serious crimes. The hardened pressure against the Court is undeniable, however, which makes it all the more important to stand firm and strongly resist all efforts to weaken the Court, including by introducing ambiguities to language on its role. Protecting populations at risk of mass atrocities is a goal of both the International Criminal Court and the Security Council, as is the prevention of conflict.

Secondly, the Council must also focus on preventive measures in all phases of cycles of conflict. In that regard, I thank Sweden for facilitating a resolution that incorporates important gains. The Council now recognizes that the protection of children affected by armed conflict should be part of strategies to resolve conflict and sustain peace. It recognizes the importance of addressing root causes of conflict and violations of human rights, as well as the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in formulating an integrated approach to conflict prevention.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains convinced that even more must be done. It is crucial that the Council listen carefully to testimonies like Ms. Londoño's. The progress observed in Colombia provides a strong case for how mainstreaming child protection and prioritizing children's issues in peace processes can contribute to lasting peace.

My third point concerns the importance of strong tools for an effective, credible and transparent mandate. The mandate for children and armed conflict is equipped with tools that have real and significant impact on the ground. That includes the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the annual report by the Secretary-General and its annexes that list parties committing grave violations.

It is important to remember that the Council, in its resolution 1612 (2005) of 13 years ago, underlined the importance of timely, objective, accurate and reliable information for those tools to remain effective. Timely information enables the Council to act in an apt and swift manner. A high frequency of conclusions in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the timely publication of the annual report of the Secretary-General are crucial in that regard. Accurate information is only possible if there are enough actors on the ground to report and verify violations and if they are assured proper access.

Objective and reliable information includes transparency on listing criteria. That allows for meaningful dialogue and safeguards the credibility and impartiality of the children and armed conflict mandate.

The children and armed conflict mandate is unique in its effectiveness and makes a distinctive difference to children affected by conflict. The Council bears continuing responsibility to stop the unacceptable plight of these children. The Kingdom of the Netherlands, as a member of the Council and beyond, is a committed partner in this endeavour.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I congratulate Sweden on its presidency and I thank the Russian delegation for its leadership in June. I want to thank the Prime Minister of Sweden for convening this very important debate. I thank Ms. Fore and Ms. Gamba for their leadership. Ms. Londoño's story is inspiring. I welcome her to the club of mothers. She will never know again what it is like not to worry. She was the right voice at the right time to help us with this issue and I thank her.

It has been more than two decades since the Security Council established the mandate for children and armed conflict. In that time, one generation has grown up and an entirely new generation has come into this world. More than 60 per cent of people in conflict-affected countries are under the age of 25. That means that in those places there is an entire generation of kids who have lived in conflict their entire lives. Those are the same kids who will some day be in charge of their countries. Some of them will be the same people making future decisions about peace and security, so we need to care about how the next generation is growing up.

Last fall, I visited with families displaced by violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where we know the armed forces are continuing to coordinate with groups that recruit child soldiers and sexually exploit boys and girls. Knowing this, I sat down and talked to Congolese women to hear about their lives. I looked into their eyes, I held their hands and I met their children. Sadly, their stories were all the same: they were overwhelmed, heartbroken and suffering.

I met one women, Angelique, who was the mother of seven children. She was raped on two different occasions during violent attacks, and because she had trouble coping with the trauma, her husband left her to take care of her children alone. As a mother myself, I wanted to understand how she copes and what she tells her children in the midst of so much pain. Her answer has haunted me since. She tells her children to stay with her in the camp and suffer together as a family. She tells her sons not to leave the camp because they would be abducted and forced into fighting. She tells her daughters not to leave the camp because they would be raped. Her children have no home, no school, no choices and no hope for the future.

When I asked Angelique and other women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan what they wanted most, their answer surprised me. It was not better living conditions, more food or material things. It was for their children to be able to go to school to get an education. They did not want their kids to be bored, to become vulnerable to violence and to get swept up into the endless cycle of conflict. They wanted their kids to be in school and have the opportunity to live a better life.

It is imperative that we listen to these mothers. Educating children who have fled from violence is an investment in the future stability of a country. If we fail, these children will grow up to be uneducated, unskilled and resentful. They will be prime targets for recruitment by extremists and armed groups, and the cycle will continue. If we do not do something about the way these kids are being educated in refugee and internally displaced person camps, we might be dealing with them as adults on the battlefield. Education is both a way to recover from conflict and prevent it in the future.

The United States is a proud leader in providing resources for education, workforce training and psychosocial support to more than 50.2 million children and youth in 51 countries, including 11.8 million children in crisis and conflict environments. In Mali, we are working with the Government to enrol more than 5,100 children and youth in an accelerated education programme. We are partnering with local non-governmental organizations to provide books, desks and learning supplies and increase parental involvement in their children's education. In Jordan, we are helping the Government cope with the mass influx of Syrian refugees. The United States has committed $230 million to build 2,000 new classrooms and renovate 250 schools.

The United States is not working alone. Other countries have joined us in supporting new and innovative mechanisms, like Education Cannot Wait. Managed by UNICEF, that is the first global fund dedicated to education in humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises.

But putting children behind a desk in a classroom only goes so far. Children cannot be expected to focus and learn after they have experienced so much pain and violence. Children who have escaped or were released by armed groups in places like South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo live with even deeper wounds from the unspeakable acts they were forced to do.

The Security Council must hold Governments accountable for how they treat children both during and after active conflicts. They cannot neglect the unseen damage done to children's hearts and minds. To create sustainable peace, stabilization plans must prioritize basic education and psychosocial support for all victims — both boys and girls — including children born from sexual violence.

Childhood is short. Time is not on the side of child victims in conflict. The United States welcomes this discussion. We support the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), and we urge our colleagues to do more to save new generations from being lost to the pain and trauma of armed conflict. Living through violence and conflict should not determine a child's future. Every child deserves the opportunity to flourish.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to warmly thank the Swedish presidency of the Council for organizing this open debate on the children and armed conflict agenda item, which is an absolute priority for us. I also thank the Swedish presidency for having steered the important resolution that we have just adopted (resolution 2427 (2018)). It is a rare privilege to have the Prime Minister of Sweden here with us to preside over this essential debate.

Finally, I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore and Yenny Londoño for their illuminating and inspiring briefings. More broadly, I wish to thank all actors, particularly from civil society, who work every day on the ground to protect children. They deserve our admiration and support.

I note the worrying increase in the number of violations of children's rights, which must lead us to remain more mobilized than ever and to make the best use of the precious tools that the Council has adopted. Within the framework of the method proposed by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, during the open debate on 31 October of last year (see S/PV.8082), I will outline several new areas of work for the coming months.

First of all, more than 20 years after the creation of the agenda, the tools adopted by the Security Council are more essential than ever given the increase in the number of violations of children's rights. The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465) shows a marked increase in the number of violations in 2017, with more than 21,000 verified cases and some areas, such as Afghanistan or Somalia, that remain of serious concern.

However, certain developments are encouraging, such as the extraction of children from armed groups in Colombia, the signing of new action plans in Mali, the Central African Republic and Nigeria, and the release, in total, of more than 10,000 child soldiers. Those successes call for the continuation of over 20 years of efforts of the Council and the actors on the ground.

First of all, the mandate entrusted to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to engage in dialogue with the parties and obtain concrete commitments from them, in particular through the action plans, is of paramount importance in this context. This field work, conducted in close coordination with United Nations country teams, is certainly difficult, but absolutely essential. Like the monitoring and alert mechanism, it must remain at the heart of the agenda.

Secondly, as we all stressed at the Arria Formula meeting last May, those action plans must be comprehensive and seek to eliminate all serious violations. Their implementation must also be assessed in the light of all such violations.

Thirdly, it is essential for peacekeeping operations to maintain adequate resources. Child protection advisers play a crucial role, as demonstrated each year by the release of children following the tireless efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and through the central role of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic in the recent signing of a new action plan in the Central African Republic.

Fourthly, we would also like to commend Sweden's work as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which plays an key role.

Finally, a normative framework — a constitutional bloc to protect children — has been created and continues to be developed. We therefore call on the States that have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; to endorse the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or groups, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), which are a reference for all actors, especially in the field, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which complement the foundational Paris Principles. This group of instruments is complete and operational, and is destined to become universal.

In that connection, we must redouble our efforts to better protect children through actions ranging from prevention to reintegration. Conflicts evolve, as do the methods employed by belligerent parties. Resolution 2427 (2018), adopted today by the Council, on which France has worked very closely with Sweden and with all members of the Council, provides several important operational responses in that regard. I note the following six areas of work.

First, we must respond to the cross-border nature of violations committed against children. It will therefore be essential to combat violations against children in the context of trafficking and to strengthen the role of regional and subregional organizations in that regard.

Secondly, we must ensure more effective prevention, including by raising awareness and guaranteeing access to education in schools protected against attacks. The detailed analysis of recruitment methods used by non-State armed groups and work on early warning systems will also be very useful.

Thirdly, we all recognize that is key to sustainably strengthen reintegration mechanisms when children are released.

Fourthly, we must more carefully consider the specific needs of girls in order to prevent their stigmatization, and adopt a gender-specific approach to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

Fifthly, we must ensure full compliance with children's rights and applicable international standards in order to put an end to the illegal detention of children.

Sixthly and finally, strengthening the fight against impunity is the best prevention method. The role of international justice, including that of the International Criminal Court, are very important in that regard.

We also have a duty to raise public awareness in the Council. I propose that we regularly use the press and press statements to do so.

The protection of children and their rights is not only a universal moral obligation but also one of the essential conditions for lasting peace. Children embody hope for reconciliation and reconstruction, as has been so rightly pointed out. The best interests of the child must therefore prevail everywhere and children's voices must be heard. Their rights must be respected. The Council knows my country's constant and historic commitment to the protection of children in armed conflict. France is more determined than ever to act to strengthen our collective action.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We are grateful to Sweden for convening this open debate and for its leadership of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We are very glad to see you, Mr. Prime Minister, as you preside over this debate, which demonstrates the significance you attach to this important topic. We are grateful to all the briefers for sharing their thoughts, which we have found very useful. We very much appreciate the contribution of all three.

In our consideration of the various reports of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict around the world at the level of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as our discussions on various conflicts here in the Council, so many instances of continued grave violations of international humanitarian law committed by parties to armed conflicts continue to be extremely alarming. In that regard, we welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) and we thank Sweden for its efforts as the penholder in facilitating the negotiation of the draft text. We hope that the resolution will make a substantive contribution to the protection of children in armed conflict. The large number of sponsors is a testament to the level of concern of Member States about the fate of children in conflicts and to the very effective way Sweden has been discharging its obligation.

However, it is very clear that much more needs to be done to ensure the protection of children affected by armed conflict and prevent the grave violations against them, which have reached very worrying levels. In that context, we believe that there are a few considerations that should be taken into account to help ensure the protection of children in the context of armed conflict.

First, since the adoption of the groundbreaking resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict, there has been significant progress in the protection and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict in different parts of the world. The engagement with parties to an armed conflict, the signing of action plans with countries concerned and close follow-up of the situation by the Security Council and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict continue to play a critical role in further strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflicts. On the other hand, reports of continued grave violations against children in the context of armed conflict require all of us to further strengthen those efforts. In other words, more enhanced international cooperation is becoming vital to protecting children facing this tragedy.

Second, it is important to recognize the proximity and strategic advantage of regional organizations in addressing the impact of armed conflict on children. It is therefore important for the United Nations, in particular the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and other actors, such as UNICEF, to further strengthen their cooperation and coordination with regional organizations, such as the African Union, including in their engagement with parties to an armed conflict and the implementation of action plans.

Third, as much as possible, peace processes and ceasefire agreements should ensure the protection of children in armed conflict, in particular by ensuring access to humanitarian assistance as well as formal separation and reintegration of children recruited by parties to an armed conflict. It is therefore necessary to encourage relevant parties to take into account the needs of children affected by armed conflict in the negotiation of ceasefire agreements and other peace processes.

Fourth, peace operations continue to have a significant role in the protection of civilians, including children affected by armed conflicts. In that regard, ensuring that peace operations have the capabilities and force enablers necessary for the full implementation of their mandates on the protection of civilians is of the utmost importance. Furthermore, the deployment of child protection advisers in peace operations is also critical and should receive the utmost attention, as it contributes to mainstreaming child protection and leading monitoring, reporting and prevention efforts in peace operations.

Fifth, Ethiopia recognizes the importance of strict compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to an armed conflict in relation to their means and methods of combat, including by protecting civilians from the effects of hostilities. However, it is a matter of concern to note the increased incidents of grave violations against children in different parts of the world and the protection challenges associated with serious disregard for international humanitarian law by parties to an armed conflict. That is why it is important that the Council follow this matter and urge parties to an armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Sixth, it is necessary to ensure that children formerly associated with armed groups or forces not be deprived of their liberty and are treated primarily as victims Furthermore, it is vital to strengthen our investment in rehabilitation and reintegration projects to comprehensively address the needs of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups as soon as possible, in full respect of their rights as children and as victims.

Seventh, Ethiopia recognizes the role of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in tracking the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, including in the context of peace operations. We also note some of the concerns that have been raised in relation to the Mechanism, particularly in the procedures related to reporting of alleged violations in the context of peace operations. There is need to take concrete steps to address those concerns, particularly by aligning the reporting standards with those under peacekeeping operations.

Finally, I would like to conclude by reiterating the firm commitment of Ethiopia to ensure the protection of children in an armed conflict. We will continue to work with all the relevant actors in that regard

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the Swedish presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate on the issue of children and armed conflict, which is a priority for our country. We especially commend you for your participation, Mr. Prime Minister, which serves to highlight your country's commitment to this important issue. We would also like express our appreciation for the important briefings by Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Yenny Londoño, representative of civil society. We also thank Ms. Londoño for sharing her valuable insights.

Peru is a country committed to the agenda on children in armed conflict. Children make up one of the most vulnerable segments of any population, and suffer in many ways from violence, devastation, humanitarian crises and displacements forced by contemporary conflicts. We condemn in the strongest terms all forms of violence against minors in armed conflicts, including sexual violence, and prioritize their protection. That includes bringing those responsible to justice and addressing the root causes that make possible the commission of these atrocious crimes.

We deplore the magnitude and gravity of violations of the rights of children in contemporary conflicts. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) provides an account of its increase in 2017 over the previous year, with at least 6,000 cases attributed to Government forces and more than 15,000 to non-State armed groups.

The States Members and the Organization, as well as the Council, have the responsibility to act effectively to eradicate violence against children and allow them to enjoy full lives, free of fear, of the loss of family and friends and of traumas and injuries. To that end, among other measures, we emphasize the importance of working in close coordination with the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and with UNICEF, to adhere to and fully implement the relevant international instruments and to follow the preventive approach provided by the concept of sustaining peace.

I should like to mention that Peru recently signed on to the Safe Schools Declaration, an instrument that, in view of the deplorable increase in attacks on schools, seeks to improve the protection provided to students, staff and educational establishments during conflicts. We also highlight the need to implement the Paris Principles and Commitments, which provide guidelines to protect children against recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups and to secure their freedom and social reintegration. We consider the reintegration and rehabilitation of girls and boys to be of special importance, with a view to restoring their dignity and hope and empowering them as future promoters of sustainable peace.

We also want to point out the importance of peacekeeping operations deployed by the Council prioritizing the protection of children, including training peacekeepers in that regard. Moreover, the work of United Nations country teams and civil society is key to that end.

There is undoubtedly much that remains to be done on this issue, and we welcome, Mr. President, the adoption of the important resolution 2427 (2018), proposed and facilitated by the delegation of Sweden and adopted today with Peru's sponsorship, which we were honoured to provide.

Before I conclude, I should also like to express our appreciation and support for the work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and to highlight the priority that the Secretary-General attaches to this issue, in line with the need to build sustainable peace. Peru will continue to work constructively to promote the children-and-armed-conflict agenda, which we believe should occupy a central place in the work of the Council, which should continue to encourage, support and monitor specific commitments and plans for the prevention of violence against children.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to welcome you, Mr. President, as you preside over today's important meeting. At the same time, we pay tribute to Sweden as it carries out its chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as for its efforts aimed at reaching consensus on the resolution that we just adopted (resolution 2427 (2018)). I would also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Yenny Londoño, for their briefings this morning. I would like as well to express our appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations system to address this topic, which represents a great challenge for the international community, namely, children and armed conflict.

The crises and unrest in our world serve to highlight an appalling increase in the suffering of children especially in armed conflict. We are concerned about the almost 35 per cent increase in the number of violations perpetrated against children as compared to the reporting period in 2016. Armed conflicts have negative consequences on children, and include their recruitment and use, exploitation, mass abduction, sexual violence, killing and maiming. The international community should effectively respond to all those issues, which threaten peace and security, while fully complying with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The best way to protect children and end violations against them is to forestall armed conflicts and create sustainable peace.

Since the Graça Machel report on the impact of armed conflict on children (see A/51/306), which was published more than 20 years ago, the United Nations has recognized that the best way to protect children is to prevent conflicts. All United Nations reports and resolutions, including today's resolution 2427 (2018), acknowledge that truth. We believe that protecting children in armed conflicts should be an integral part of any inclusive conflict-settlement strategy and all procedures to be undertaken by United Nations entities, especially within the framework of Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, which supports and complements the efforts of national Governments. That should be done in close cooperation with the United Nations and the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in order to bolster national plans and all other forms of cooperation for the protection of children in armed conflict, with the support of the relevant regional and sub-egional organizations, each within its mandate.

We call upon all States Members to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol thereto in order to enhance the protection of children in armed conflict. The Paris Principles and the Paris Commitments were issued 11 years ago to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups. The State of Kuwait would like to welcome anew the voluntary commitment to those principles, which call for ending inhumane practices against children, and to reiterate the importance of using and optimizing all the tools and mechanisms adopted by the Security Council so as to enhance the procedures that aim to address violations against children.

With respect to children and armed conflict and the importance of transparency, we are compelled to highlight the suffering of the unarmed Palestinian people and their children under the heavy yoke of occupation for more than five decades. We would also like to highlight the suffering, including maiming, killing and rape and other forms of sexual violence, of the children of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar. It is incumbent upon us as a Council to shoulder our responsibility and take all the necessary measures to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, so as to safeguard safety and freedom of movement without any ethnic or religious discrimination, and enhance mechanisms designed to make all perpetrators of such violations accountable.

We reiterate the central role of national Governments in achieving effective and sustainable protection for children, in accordance with resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009). The work of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children is also important, in line with resolution 1612 (2005). All that should take place while bein able to rely on impartial, reliable and credible sources and independent United Nations observers. Member States should also be informed about the facts of the situation being monitored.

Expressing our anger repeatedly about these atrocities is not enough. It is time to put an end to the violence against children and make the perpetrators of these crimes accountable. Now more than ever, our joint efforts and international unity are needed to provide children with effective protection and ensure their legitimate rights.

It is very important to realize that ending conflicts does not mean ending the suffering of children. Sustainable peace requires the development and implementation of mechanisms for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by conflicts into their communities, by way of including the protection of children in all peace processes. There is no peace while children continue to suffer from psychological, physical, social and health effects. In that regard, we welcome the release and reintegration of 10,000 children into their communities in 2017, a development that will eventually enhance sustainable peace. We also welcome the establishment of an international fund, upon the initiative of the United Nations and in partnership with the World Bank, for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by conflicts.

We would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all related international conventions and resolutions do not differentiate between children and adults. In that context, the second preambular paragraph of the Charter of the United Nations reiterates our determination

> "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

Mr. Radomski (Poland): I would like to begin by indicating that Poland aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

I thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for presiding over today's important meeting. We very much appreciate Sweden's work on resolution 2427 (2018), which the Security Council just adopted. We also value Sweden's strong leadership as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, for their important briefings. We also deeply appreciate the moving and inspirational testimony of Ms. Yenny Londoño. It is significant for all of us to hear her voice, which speaks for civil society.

We should all be disturbed by this year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465). The report shows that in conflicts around the world children are being killed and maimed, abducted and attacked in schools and hospitals, recruited to fight, sexually abused and denied humanitarian aid by State and non-State actors alike. All parties to armed conflict should share the obligation of protecting children from violence, and yet all too often violations and abuses of international law affecting children are widespread. As Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) concerning South Sudan, Poland is particularly concerned about the growing number of violations being committed against children in South Sudan by all parties to the conflict.

We believe that constructive and close engagement with the national Governments concerned is essential to establishing durable peace, security and development. In that context we welcome the signing by Mali, Nigeria and the Central African Republic of new action plans with the United Nations aimed at ending and preventing violations against children in a context of armed conflict. We note with satisfaction the Sudan's completion of its action plan and would like to congratulate Colombia on its achievements in the area of the protection of children reached through the peace process over the past year.

I would like to emphasize the responsibility of all the parties listed the annexes to the Secretary-General's report to enter into and fully implement concrete and time-bound action plans with the United Nations to end all violations immediately. We call on the parties with existing action plans to take immediate steps to ensure that they are more effectively implemented and to report on their progress. We believe that the international community should take all possible steps to eradicate the underlying causes and the consequences of children's engagement in armed conflicts. We must be more effective and resolute in considering how to prevent the recruitment of children, encourage their reintegration into their societies and deal with the long-term psychological and social implications for survivors. Throughout that process, all children, girls and boys alike, should be treated as victims, not as perpetrators. The lack of reintegration options for demobilized children increases their risk of re-recruitment.

We particularly want to stress the role of education for children, including in times of crisis. During emergencies, children in schools can be cared for, accounted for and protected from abduction, recruitment and sexual and economic exploitation. Education also paves the way for their stronger integration into society. If we are to ensure that the programmes have long-term effects and prevent re-recruitment into armed groups and armed forces, the international community must continue to provide the necessary financial resources. At their core, such efforts can ensure that children will have a successful future for the global community as for themselves. Lastly, Poland is a staunch advocate of the effective protection and promotion of the rights of the child through the adoption of internationally recognized preventive measures. We proudly endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and guidelines and the Vancouver Principles, and we call on other States to do the same.

We still have a lot to do in order to prevent and end the violations and abuses that children face in conflict situations. Poland will continue to stand behind the important work being done by the United Nations to protect children.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you, Mr. Prime Minister, as you preside over the Security Council today, and would like to thank our Swedish partners for their initiative in organizing today's meeting. We wish you a successful and productive presidency of the Security Council for July, and we are sure that your very professional team will handle any problems. We greatly appreciate the contributions of the Secretary-General and today's briefers, Ms. Virginia Gamba, Ms. Henrietta Fore and Ms. Yenny Londoño, to our discussion.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465) confirms that children in a number of countries around the world that are involved in armed confrontations continue to encounter brutal violence. One of the main reasons for their plight is that the parties to armed conflicts frequently ignore the norms of international humanitarian law and non-governmental armed groups make open use of barbaric methods of warfare. The Russian Federation firmly condemns all crimes against children, including their recruitment and use as combatants, their murder or abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and denials of access for humanitarian organizations to help them. In acknowledging its responsibility, the Security Council cannot remain indifferent and should make unfailing efforts to protect children in situations of armed conflict.

The situation in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa remains extremely difficult. The weakening of State mechanisms in Syria as a result of illegal external interference resulted in a flood of terrorist groups there. As the Secretary-General's report notes, the militants are not shy of using even very young children in their ranks, and their systematic recruitment of minors, deprivation of their access to education, and general violence have become commonplace, something that the international community has no intention of becoming reconciled to. Jihadists do not hesitate to involve children in their inhuman designs for fabricating incidents, including those involving allegedly chemical substances. They do this to get international attention, denigrate the legitimate authorities and bring punishment down on them from the world community. For our part, we will continue to reveal the true face of pseudo-humanitarian non-governmental organizations such as the White Helmets, which have brought shame on themselves by collaborating with openly terrorist groups in Syria.

The situation in Yemen has noticeably deteriorated, with hundreds of children killed and injured as a result of strikes and shelling. The widespread destruction of schools, hospitals and infrastructure creates intolerable living conditions and deprives children of a future. The future of Palestinian children is worrying, thanks in part to Israel's continuing policies of expanding settlements and demolishing Palestinian property, including schools. Many children are at risk of being unable to attend school this summer because the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is underfunded. We consider it unacceptable to impose ideologies of hatred and nationalism on children and raise them with false historical facts and values. Children should not be discriminated against on the basis of nationality, denied the right to receive education in their native language and free development. Unfortunately, we are seeing egregious cases of such violations in various countries and will continue to draw attention to them.

International humanitarian law includes a significant body of norms designed to protect children and civil infrastructure during armed conflicts. The efforts of the international community should be focused on ensuring the implementation of existing obligations. Bringing those responsible for serious crimes against children and violations of international humanitarian law to justice is crucial, and primary responsibility for taking the necessary measures in this area rests with States. Many States involved in armed conflicts are making significant efforts to improve the situation of children. However, they need the support of the international community within a framework of respectful and constructive dialogue and with unconditional respect for the principles of State sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.

Once again, we call for an end to the pernicious policy of imposing unilateral restrictions on countries in conflict. For example, the sanctions imposed on Syria, as we read in the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Mr. Jazairy, following his visit to the Syrian Arab Republic, are in essence a collective punishment of all Syrians, including children.

The Russian Federation supports the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her initiatives. In particular, I would like to note that the Russian football association, along with a number of other such federations, has joined the Special Representative's Children, Not Soldiers: Let Them Play information campaign, in the framework of the 2018 FIFA World Cup championship currently being held in Russia. Over the course of the championship, we and our Swedish colleagues have agreed to display the official World Cup football on the Council table as a symbol of peace and harmony among nations and of the desire to fight and compete only in sporting events. The work of the Special Representative implies a special responsibility, impartiality and objectivity, and it is extremely important to have reliable and verifiable information reflected in the reports of the Secretary-General. With respect to such issues, any politicization is unacceptable.

We note the contribution of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to efforts to support States in preparing and implementing national plans of action for protecting children in armed conflict. The practice of appointing experts on the protection of children in peacekeeping missions has proved positive. We expect these officials to monitor situations effectively and fulfil their mandate. In our view, any duplication of functions or reporting by other components of United Nations country missions is wasteful.

We have taken note of the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report. Overall, the Council's efforts should be based on approaches that have been developed and approved within the United Nations framework. The Russian Federation supported today's adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), on children and armed conflict. It contains a comprehensive set of provisions whose implementation will strengthen cooperation in this area. For our part, we are ready to pursue comprehensive cooperation in order to effectively protect children from the consequences of armed action.

Mrs. Cordova Soría (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we thank Sweden for its leadership during the negotiations of resolution 2427 (2018), adopted today, which we had the pleasure of co-sponsoring and which undoubtedly provides a framework for the integration of protection, rights, welfare and empowerment of children throughout the conflict cycle, reinforcing in turn the mandate of the Special Representative and emphasizing reintegration as an essential part of demobilization and disarmament processes, as well as accountability for all violations against children. We also appreciate Sweden's role as organizer of this open debate, whose focus is on protecting children today in order to prevent conflicts tomorrow.

We welcome the presence of the Prime Minister of Sweden, Mr. Stefan Löfven, and the Prime Minister of Aruba, of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ms. Evelyn Wever-Croes.

Likewise, we appreciate the briefings provided by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba; the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore; and the representative of Colombian civil society, Ms. Yenny Londoño, who shared her experience and recommendations with us.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) and the information provided by Ms. Gamba today reflect the harsh reality faced by children immersed in conflicts, who account for an increase of 27 per cent in violations in 2017 compared to 2016. More than 10,000 children were killed or maimed in 2017. The number of verified cases of the recruitment and use of children rose by a factor of four in the Central African Republic and two in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while in the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen the figures remained at an alarming level.

We also condemn the constant attacks on schools and universities, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories, where the United Nations has documented 164 incidents that interrupted access to education and in many cases have led to the detention of more than 304 boys and girls in Israeli prisons, some of whom have been brought before military tribunals, while many others have simply been subject to administrative detention.

The main factors in this increase are the proliferation and expansion of armed groups, wars over natural resources that provoke and sustain conflicts, the internationalization of terrorism and the changing nature of conflicts. Such factors cannot be effectively combated. We agree with the focus of today's debate on the theme "Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow". The best way to protect children is to address the root causes of conflicts, including war, lack of security, illicit human trafficking, arms trafficking, terrorism, policies of regime change, competition for natural resources and socioeconomic conditions related to the unequal distribution of wealth.

Combating these factors should involve a comprehensive strategy to prevent conflicts and children's participation in them. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is particularly relevant in this context, as is fighting poverty and inequality and promoting education and its accessibility to all children, particularly girls, in order to confront and end the violations and abuses of which they are victims, especially in the context of armed conflicts. To this we must add the importance of preventive diplomacy, mediation and good offices in order to maintain peace, build it and enable it to be sustainable in the long term.

Just as important is compliance with international regulations on the part of the international community, including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977, in addition to the provisions contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Bolivia calls on States that have not yet done so to adhere to those important international instruments. In that regard, and in view of our commitment to this agenda, we welcome the Safe Schools Declaration initiative, through which States commit themselves to protect students, teachers, schools and universities during armed conflicts.

We also deem it important to reaffirm the important role that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General plays in contributing to the prevention of conflicts in the context of her mandate by facilitating better collaboration between the United Nations, the Governments concerned and United Nations partners on the ground, as well as its support for the in-country efforts of the United Nations Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to improve dialogue with relevant agencies of the United Nations, Governments and parties to armed conflict, in order to obtain concrete commitments and advocate for appropriate response mechanisms. In that respect, the Special Representative must continue to engage proactively with United Nations agencies, Member States, regional and subregional organizations and non-State armed groups, and, together with the relevant actors, compile best practices for their implementation, in accordance with the resolution adopted today.

We welcome the fact that UNICEF facilitated the appointment of a Senior Child Protection Adviser by the African Union, which will undoubtedly help channel the experiences of countries in the region into signing and successfully implementing action plans. In that regard, the Security Council's commitment to children in armed conflict has been realized through such plans aimed at both stopping and preventing serious violations.

The international community must ensure the allocation of adequate budgetary and human resources and personnel dedicated to the protection of children so that the United Nations can respond effectively to serious violations against children. To that end, the nexus linking the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, financial institutions and donors must be strengthened. Similarly, the follow-up process with the World Bank and the Peacebuilding Fund could be more systematic so as to ensure and implement the recommendations of the Working Group. Discussions could also be held on how to ensure adequate human and financial resources after the signing of action plans so as to ensure their effective implementation.

Likewise, action plans should not only support the processes of demobilizing and disarming children associated with armed groups but must also place particular emphasis on reintegration. That includes rehabilitation, psychosocial support, education, specific gender- and age-based needs, economic opportunities, sustained support to families and communities to combat the stigmatization of former child soldiers, and cooperating closely with host countries. In the long-term, they are the ones that must ensure the security of their populations and implement the necessary measures to ensure respect for children's human rights following conflict.

In conclusion, protecting children in armed conflict is an endeavour that concerns the entire international community, including the Governments of States that are victims of conflict, the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, as well as civil society. Accordingly, their actions must be guided by prioritizing their protection, providing them with an opportunity to enjoy a future in which they can fully develop their abilities. Achieving that will be a step towards the prevention of conflicts and towards ridding humankind of the scourge of war.

Mr. Djedje (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire commends you, Mr. Prime Minister, for guiding the work of the Security Council and welcomes the holding of this open debate devoted to the issue of children and armed conflict. My delegation expresses its gratitude to Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their instructive briefings on the situation concerning children and armed conflicts throughout the world. I also thank Ms. Yenny Londoño, of the Colombian civil society group, for her briefing.

Although it has been a particular focus of attention for decades, the protection of children in armed conflict remains a major concern that calls for greater involvement on the part of the international community with a view towards a concerted and holistic response to confronting the challenge. Despite the adoption of major international instruments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, of 20 November 1989, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, of 25 May 2000, the phenomenon has only increased in scale. The annual report (S/2018/465) of the Secretary-General, published on 16 May, sounds the alarm in pointing out the significant increase in serious violations against children in conflict-ridden areas in 2017. It lists more than 21,000 cases — an increase of 31 per cent as compared to 2016, which gives cause for great concern.

Moreover, the direct participation of children as soldiers in conflicts, their use as human bombs and human shields and recurrent attacks on schools, as well as their use for military purposes, are a source of concern for the international community. It is imperative to redouble efforts aimed at implementing concrete measures to prevent and combat such practices, which have disastrous, and often irreversible, consequences for the well-being and development of too many children. In that regard, the Secretary-General's actions plans — while stressing the commitment of parties to conflict, as well as the responsibility of Governments to protect children affected by armed conflict, in accordance with resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005) — constitute appropriate mechanisms that have demonstrated their effectiveness in achieving concrete progress on the ground.

Côte d'Ivoire, which was listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's reports on the plight of children in armed conflict from 2003 to 2006, following the political-military crisis it experienced, was a pioneer in the history of signing and effectively implementing action plans for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. As early as 2005, the Forces armées des Forces nouvelles, an armed group opposed to the Government at the time of the conflict, signed with the United Nations the first-ever action plan for the protection of children in armed conflict, thereby marking the starting point for the signing and implementing of such a document. In 2006, four pro-Government militias followed in the footsteps of the Forces armées des Forces nouvelles by signing other action plans. Thanks to genuine cooperation with the United Nations and partnering non-governmental organizations, their implementation enabled the release of hundreds of children with a view to their reintegration into society. A strategy to combat stigmatization was put in place, which involved bringing together former child soldiers, who accounted for approximately one third of the total number of participants, and another two thirds of non-soldier children from the community — all of whom were lodged in the same centre and received equal treatment so as to facilitate their social reintegration. That enabled training the older ones with basic trade skills and enroling the younger ones in school.

With regard to progress made since 2007, Côte d'Ivoire has been removed from the annex to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. That delisting was the first of its kind in history. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to welcome the full implementation of other action plans, in particular in the Sudan, as well as the progress achieved in protecting children through commitments within the framework of the peace process in Colombia. We also welcome the signing of new action plans in Mali, Nigeria and the Central African Republic, the implementation of which will undoubtedly help reduce the suffering of children affected by conflict in those countries. It has also been shown that well-resourced reintegration programmes are effective tools in peacebuilding. Côte d'Ivoire encourages the donor community to support efforts to reintegrate former child soldiers into society.

My delegation believes that the protection of children in armed conflict must be an integral part of any comprehensive strategy for conflict resolution and peacekeeping, as part of a conflict prevention strategy. In that regard, my country looks forward with interest to the development of practical guidelines on mainstreaming child protection issues in peace processes, led by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

My delegation remains convinced that such mainstreaming requires the adequate training of all relevant actors, including the defence and security forces. In that regard, the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire have been including child rights and protection education in the training programme of military training schools and combat units since 10 March 2004, with the establishment of decentralized focal points throughout the country. All military regions in Côte d'Ivoire today have a child rights protection cell. Furthermore, the promotion of children's rights and protection is now integrated into the training curriculums for Côte d'Ivoire police officers. I should like ot take this opportunity to emphasize the important role of child protection advisers, whose presence and capacities should be strengthened within peacekeeping operations.

Côte d'Ivoire commends the commitment of regional and subregional organizations in the implementation of programmes for the protection of children, and encourages them to strengthen their commitment to supporting the efforts of Member States, in accordance with the Secretary-General's recommendations and resolution 2427 (2018), which we have just unanimously adopted.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates the support of Côte d'Ivoire to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her teams on the ground and urges them to continue their efforts to protect children, particularly those associated with armed conflict.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, on behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, allow me to express my gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of Sweden, for convening this open debate on the important and timely issue of children and armed conflict, and to express our satisfaction at the fact that he has come to New York to preside over it. We commend the exemplary work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and commend Sweden's sponsorship of resolution 2427 (2018), which we just adopted and was also co-sponsored by Equatorial Guinea. All of that demonstrates Sweden's strong commitment to the protection of children. We also thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba, as well as our guest Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF. Moreover, we thank Ms. Yenny Londoño, civil society representative, for her emotional briefing.

Equatorial Guinea is deeply concerned by the increase in the number and seriousness of violations committed against children, as documented in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465). According to the report, there were at least 6,000 verified violations committed by Government forces and more than 15,000 by non-State armed groups, including high numbers of killing and maiming, recruitment, use of sexual violence and abductions. Even more alarming is the fact that, despite the presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/21) adopted after the open debate on the same topic on 31 October 2017 (S/PV.8082), in which 63 statements were made, there was a 31 per cent increase in the number of violations against children that year, as compared to 2016. That is totally unacceptable and must be reduced immediately.

That is why the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, in line with the relevant instruments of the African Union and drawing on lessons from specific cases that occurred during conflicts in some countries in our region, underlines the need to further develop a criminal legal framework to protect children from armed conflict in Africa and throughout the world. In that regard, we stress the need for the international community to ensure that violations of children's rights do not go unpunished and for all Member States to commit themselves to do their utmost to ensure that those responsible for such violations against children are brought to justice and pay for their crimes.

On the sad issue of violations against children, our obligation not only lies in our mission to maintain international peace but is a basic moral obligation as human beings. The care and reintegration of children must be a central part of any reconciliation and peace process, with the support of the Security Council. Solving problems relevant to children must be an integral part of any agreement, understanding or dialogue between the parties involved in a conflict.

We must not ignore international law and its impact on children. All actors involved in the protection of children's rights must redouble their efforts to continue to protect children affected by conflict, in particular against recruitment, abuse and violence. We believe that it is important for Member States to join their efforts and actions, including by implementing international standards and norms on the protection of children, in order to ensure special protection for children.

In that regard, Equatorial Guinea has established national policies within the framework of its national committee to support children in my country. Since children and young people represent the future of a country, they must be considered as peacemakers. That is why it is important to involve them in peace processes and socialize them as peacemakers from the beginning.

Meaningful participation in community life seems to be an effective way for children and young people to develop their potential, especially in times of conflict. With adequate support and access to necessary resources, they can become change agents and lay the foundation for rebuilding lives and communities, thereby contributing to the creation of a peaceful society. Therefore, empowering family members is a crucial component of the strategy to empower children through educational programmes, since they depend on their family members.

In conclusion, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea will continue to support efforts to protect children in armed conflict and calls upon all Member States to support the implementation of action plans and other commitments to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. The important resolution that we adopted this morning, sponsored by Sweden, constitutes a most valuable instrument through whose effective implementation, and together with other instruments and plans of action that have been adopted and entered into force, can make children safer and more protected in the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I congratulate the delegation of Sweden for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. I thank His Excellency Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of Sweden, for being personally present today and presiding over this debate, which underlines the importance of the theme and highlights the role of child protection in the prevention of conflicts and building peaceful societies.

We express our warm appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba and to UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore for their comprehensive briefings. We commend the team of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for their coordinated and relentless efforts to put an end to the grave violations against children. We also thank Ms. Yenny Londoño, who is here representing civil society, for her insights on integrating child protection issues in the peace process in Colombia. We pay tribute to the non-governmental organization community, which makes a sterling contribution as defenders of children's rights.

I will begin by expressing deep concern over the significant increase in the scale, complexity and severity of grave violations affecting children in armed conflict, as outlined in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2018/465). In the past year alone, tens of thousands of children were killed, maimed, sexually abused or recruited by armed groups and Government forces.

At the same time, the overall reduction in the number of incidents of child recruitment and the military use of schools indicates that positive change is achievable. We wholeheartedly endorse the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which covers a range of key issues of the children-and-armed conflict agenda, which was drafted by the delegation of Sweden as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The unanimous adoption of that document and its large number of co-sponsors proved that there is a strong consensus among Member States on the importance of the issue. We must use that unity to safeguard children — our most precious resource — through collective and comprehensive measures. In that regard, Kazakhstan would like to propose the following recommendations.

First, we must promote full compliance with international law and strengthen accountability for grave violations against children. It is vital that all Member States ratify and strictly implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant treaties, as Kazakhstan did. We also encourage Governments to endorse the international tools related to the protection of children in armed conflict, such as the Paris Princ iples, thVancouver Principles and the Safe Schools

Declaration, and include child protection provisions in peace and negotiating processes, especially with non-State armed groups. Enhancing the capacity of United Nations missions to monitor and report grave violations is equally important to ensure accountability.

Secondly, we need to prioritize preventive measures and efforts aimed at confidence- and capacity-building. We support the efforts of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba focused on preventive actions, including through enhanced engagement with parties to conflict, field visits and the signing of action plans, as well as strengthened cooperation with regional and subregional organizations.

Children who lack future prospects and education and live in severe poverty are more vulnerable to recruiters and perpetrators. Therefore, investments in development, providing better living conditions and meeting socioeconomic needs of children are also critical to preventing recruitment and grave violations against children. Equally important is support for capacity-building at regional and local levels through training programmes and providing interreligious and inter-ethnic education to promote tolerance.

Thirdly, we must increase support for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children formerly associated with armed groups. Adequate, predictable and sustainable funding must be provided to ensure access for children to education, vocational training, health care, basic services and trauma counselling on an immediate basis. In addition, we must rethink our approaches to reintegration and establish long-term multi-year programmes that will help children more effectively reintegrate into society and succeed in their communities.

In conclusion, I once again reiterate Kazakhstan's commitment to all collective and comprehensive measures to ensure the safety and welfare of children, who become the most vulnerable group in times of armed conflict.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China congratulates Sweden on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We welcome Prime Minister Löfven to New York and thank him for presiding over this open debate. We would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and UNICEF Executive Director Fore for their respective briefings. We also thank Ms. Londoño for her statement.

The Council just unanimously adopted resolution 2427 (2018), on children and armed conflict. We applaud the enormous efforts Sweden undertook in holding consultations and building consensus.

The issue of children in armed conflict has been on the Council's agenda for more than 20 years, which means that children who were born when the Council adopted its first resolution on this issue — resolution 1261 (1999) — are now adults. We deeply regret that the continued outbreak of armed conflicts and the spread of terrorism have rendered children among the most vulnerable groups. Ruthless wars and heinous terrorist attacks have devastated the lives of innocent children, denying them love and care and bringing them untold suffering instead. Those children need tangible and effective protection from us, as well as utmost love and care. It is incumbent upon the international community to do so. In that regard, I would like to stress the following points.

First, we must prioritize prevention by teaching our children to cherish peace and reject war in order to protect them from the harm of extremist and terrorist ideologies. All sides should ensure that children are taught from an early age to embrace the values of peace and reject violence and conflict. The international community should take effective measures against online recruitment by terrorist organizations and the incitement to violence and extremism through the Internet. We should also mobilize families, schools and communities in helping children resist terrorist and extremist ideologies. We should strengthen international counter-terrorism coorperation, adopt a zero-tolerance and non-discriminatory approach and resolutely combat all forms of crime against children committed by terrorist organizations, such as recruitment, killing, abuse and abduction.

Secondly, we must bring an end to hostilities and violence and jointly maintain international peace and security. The most effective way to protect children is to prevent and resolve conflicts. The Security Council, which is entrusted with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, must promote the use of political means as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations, including mediation, conciliation, dialogue and negotiation, and support and encourage all parties to peaceably settle their disputes and prevent armed conflicts from happening in the first place. The international community should promote the proper resolution of regional hotspot issues and fully protect the rights of children in that process. That is the fundamental way to save children from the scourge of armed conflict.

Thirdly, we must assume a long-term perspective and provide capacity-building assistance to the countries concerned. The primary responsibility for protecting children in conflicts lies with the Governments of the countries concerned. The efforts and cooperation of the countries concerned are key in fully implementing the Council's resolutions and various plans and programmes for the protection of children. We must fully respect national ownership, enhance dialogue and communication with the relevant countries and support the development of child-protection capacities in the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as security sector reform.

Fourthly, we must strengthen coordination and forge international synergy for the protection of children. UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and other relevant entities should work within their respective mandates and leverage their comparative advantages for stronger cooperation. An integrated approach is needed to support the efforts of the Governments concerned on poverty eradication, universal access to education and sustainable development.

Moreover, we should help children affected by armed conflict to reintegrate smoothly into their respective societies and provide them with a favourable security and social environment that facilitates their healthy growth so that they can become active contributors and promoters of peace in the future.

In this road that we all share, children are our common hope. Let us work together for the security and well-being of children around the world. Let us create a harmonious world in which they can grow up in health. Let us join hands to build a community of a shared future for humankind so that peace can shine down on small children as they grow and enjoy a better future.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Let me join others in welcoming Sweden's presidency of the Security Council and in thanking Russia for its stewardship during the previous month. We are also very pleased, Mr. Prime Minister, that you have convened this open debate today. It is very important for the Council to focus on the protection of children as a key element of conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Like others, I also would like to pay tribute to Ms. Londoño's insight into the effect of conflict. What she said about addressing the root causes is a theme that has been repeated by many speakers today. I also thank the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for their efforts, internationally and on the ground, to protect children and prevent them from being the victims of armed conflict.

In that regard, the United Kingdom joins others in welcoming the publication of the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2018/465). Thanks to the courageous and committed work of monitoring and reporting teams all over the world, the report continues to produce a reliable, evidence-based set of metrics, which the Council, the United Nations and others need in order to take effective action. But it also shows an alarming trend — in 2017 the number of verified violations against children in armed conflict increased by a shocking 35 per cent. It is vital that the Council address that trend, and to that end I welcome today's debate.

We have heard a lot about the next generation. We were able to hear some very good news from Côte d'Ivoire. I was interested in those experiences, as well as in what is happening in Nigeria. But, as the Council saw for itself on its mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar, there are too many children who bear the physical scars of armed conflict. We saw children amputees, a poignant and disturbing reminder of what conflict does to children. We need to take better care of the next generation so that they can, in turn, take care of their societies. There is no single answer to how we do that. We have heard many ideas put forward today. I will not repeat them. The United Kingdom shares many of the suggestions made today but, if I may, I would like to concentrate on one particular action that can have an overwhelmingly positive effect on improving stability and reducing conflict.

I am referring to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which has to do with making sure that everybody receives a quality education. That is something that Ms. Londoño and a number of Permanent Representatives have drawn attention to. As we all know, women play a vital role in the prevention and resolution of armed conflict and in peacebuilding, including in peace talks and in re-establishing the fabric of a recovering society. Yet we know that conflict restricts access to education, particularly girls' education. We should see what we can do to ameliorate that situation. Reintegration programmes should include education as a core component, while disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes should be age- and gender-sensitive in order to meet the needs of all children. We need to ensure that worldwide girls receive the education that allows them to fully participate in governance towards the achievement of durable peace, security and reconciliation — and hence, ultimately, towards conflict prevention

A staggeringly small amount of humanitarian aid was invested in education in 2016 — a mere 1.4 per cent. It goes without saying that that is not enough. We should all do more to place education at the heart of our approach to security and development. For its part, the United Kingdom is committed to providing educational support to millions of children around the world in need of education in emergencies and protracted crises. In Syria and the wider region, following on from UNICEF's No Lost Generation initiative, we allocated $110 million to provide protection, trauma care and education for children affected by the crisis in that country and the wider region. We are the largest bilateral donor to the Education Cannot Wait fund, and we are committing $40 million this year to support conflict-affected children in Uganda.

Finally, as other speakers noted, we need to ensure that schools themselves are protected. While international humanitarian law is the primary basis for the protection of schools and educational facilities, the Safe Schools Declaration, which the United Kingdom recently endorsed, reflects our commitment to the provision of, and access to, high-quality education in humanitarian situations and protracted crises.

We align ourselves with the statement that will be delivered by the representative of Argentina on behalf of all those who have endorsed the Declaration. We would like to take this opportunity to call on all of our international partners to follow suit.

As set out in the first line of the Charter of the United Nations — much quoted today — our goal is to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. We need to begin with our children, who are absolutely vital to a better future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Mr. Asselborn (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me also to congratulate Sweden on organizing this open debate under the presidency of its Prime Minister, Mr. Stefan Löfven.

Resolution 2427 (2018), which the Security Council adopted today, is an important contribution to strengthening the children and armed conflict agenda, which, as the Council knows, is particularly close to Luxembourg's heart. I can say that with great conviction because, in 2014, I myself presided over a meeting of the Council, during which resolution 2143 (2014) was adopted (see S/PV.7129). In order to maintain some momentum in the consideration of this issue by this organ, a more frequent adoption of relevant instruments is desirable.

I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. My thanks also go to the Executive Director of UNICEF for her briefing. I also listened very carefully to the moving testimony of Ms. Yenny Londoño.

The Secretary-General's annual report on the plight of children in armed conflict (S/2018/465) begins with the sad fact that in 2017 violations of all types sharply increased as compared to the previous year. Those violations are the unacceptable daily fate of more than 21,000 children living in conflicts. We must strongly condemn all violations committed against children and commit ourselves to working resolutely for respect of the rights of the child, in particular those living in armed conflict.

The report is the result of extensive consultations within the United Nations system, at Headquarters and in the field, and with the Member States concerned. We have confidence in the safeguards, including the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, to verify the accuracy of all information contained in the annual report and its annexes.

From the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Syria, from Afghanistan to Myanmar, from South Sudan to Mali, children are being killed and maimed. They are abducted, recruited by force and sexually abused by Government forces as well as non-State actors. In a context of repeated abuses, the protection of children must be systematic. Child protection programmes in times of armed conflict must have have the support of sufficient capacity and means to ensure that children can be released and reintegrated into their families and communities in a sustainable way. We emphasize the crucial importance of integrating child protection advisers with their specific mandate in United Nations operations on the ground. We note with satisfaction that 10,000 children were formally released in 2017 and an unknown number were able to lay down their arms through other means. We realize that this is only the beginning of a process in which these children must be supported on the psychosocial and educational fronts in order to sustainably break the cycle of violence and ultimately consolidate peace. The actors on the ground must be given the means they need to enable them to take on those tasks and achieve their objective, which I believe was one of Ms. Londoño's main appeals this morning.

I should congratulate the Security Council on its adoption of resolution 2419 (2018), in recognition of the importance of strengthening the inclusion of young people in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements. The marginalization of young people is detrimental to achieving lasting peace and combating violent extremism. In that context, the right to education is fundamental to building lasting peace. Schools continue to be the target of deliberate attacks and school infrastructure is routinely looted or diverted from its primary purpose for military uses, acts that deprive children of their right to an education and can breed intolerance, a resort to violence and weakened community resilience. We urge all Member States that have not yet done so to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, and we call on all States to take concrete measures to discourage the parties to conflicts from using schools for military purposes.

Lastly, while progress has been made in recent years, much remains to be done. The increase in the numbers of serious acts of violence against children and of their perpetrators suggests that too many parties are shielded from international justice. There should be no impunity for those responsible for crimes against children. The important role played by the International Criminal Court in complementing national proceedings in that regard remains central and essential.

We reiterate our unequivocal support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who has been working tirelessly for the protection of children in armed conflict, and we continue to provide concrete support to her Office and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We therefore responded positively to her request for financing the secondment of a liaison officer in Brussels with the aim of strengthening relations with European and Atlantic institutions in the context of implementing their guidelines on children and armed conflict. That includes developing a strategic road map and implementing standard monitoring and reporting procedures for the six serious violations against children identified by the Council. We have also supported a research project of the United Nations University in partnership with UNICEF, which has just ended with the publication of a study for United Nations staff in the field entitled *Cradled by Conflict*, on preventing, protecting and disengaging children from extreme violence.

We build the future with our children, which is why we must protect them if we want a future founded on lasting peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs of Ireland.

Ms. Zappone (Ireland): Thank you for convening today's debate on this extremely important subject, Mr. President. I would also like to thank today's briefers and welcome the Secretary-General's report for 2017 on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465), which makes many valuable recommendations.

Children are on the front lines of armed conflicts across the world. While their vulnerability in times of crisis has been recognized since the early days of international humanitarian law, our common efforts to protect all children from aggression and violence fall short of where we need to be. Ireland therefore welcomes a greater focus on linking the agenda on children in armed conflict with strategies for conflict prevention and sustainable peace. As a Minister responsible for children and young people, I want to define security not merely as a condition of peace but as a recognition that in order to flourish we need to live in a just and equal society where our States protect us from interpersonal violence and persecution.

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Ireland's Sean MacBride reminded us that there can be no peace without justice. I believe that inequality, in all its forms, is a driver of conflict. Gender-based violence is one of the most damaging and perilous types of injustices towards children in armed conflicts. Young girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking, so empowering them and prioritizing their protection from gender-based abuse in conflict is absolutely vital. Under Ireland's chairship of the Commission on the Status of Women earlier this year, the conclusions of the priority theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" were agreed on. We also promote the protection of girls in conflict through our national action plan on women, peace and security. That is reflected in our humanitarian action but is also a priority for our defence forces.

When violence erupts, children are frequently denied education, leaving them open to indoctrination or exploitation, and without positive economic opportunities for the rest of their lives. Ireland's development assistance programme, Irish Aid, supports a number of non-governmental organization partners at the community level in establishing safe learning spaces for boys and girls. In November 2017, Ireland was one of 65 Member States to endorse the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which raise awareness of the recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed groups and commit us to addressing issues of trauma and lost childhood.

Far beyond being merely victims of conflict, children and young people can also play a crucial role in promoting long-term peace across the globe. That is why Ireland is a strong supporter of the youth, peace and security agenda, including providing funding to the recent progress study on youth, peace and security. In 2015 we introduced a United Nations youth delegate programme, in a clear commitment to greater engagement with young people on development, human rights and global citizenship. They represent the future, the values of Ireland and the values that established the United Nations and the Security Council. It is for them that we must together be a global vehicle for developing and promoting sustainable security, a security that allows all our people to flourish.

In conclusion, I invite the Council to imagine a child who is allowed to flourish, and then one who is not. As Minister, I am particularly proud that half of the 1,883 persons accepted into Ireland under resettlement and relocation programmes are children fleeing war and conflict. In addition, Ireland is providing care for 79 children who arrived alone at our ports and airports. All of those children — from such countries experiencing conflict as Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea — are making Ireland their home. They speak for themselves in a collection of stories and art created by Syrian and Palestinian children now living in Mayo, in the West of Ireland. In the book entitled *A Strong Heart*, they tell of the beauty of their new hometowns, the local rivers, mountains and even our world-famous salmon. They express their passion for Irish sport, their sense of fun and their hopes and dreams. Khaled, who is 12-years-old and lives in Claremorris, writes,

> "My dream for the future is to be a footballer first and play for Ireland. When I am 33, I will be a teacher and go back to Syria to teach English."

Khaled and his classmates — Irish, Syrian and Palestinian — are flourishing. They are our future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): Ukraine greatly appreciates Sweden's initiative to hold this open debate, Mr. President, as well as your personally presiding over it. We thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director, for their briefings. Ukraine welcomes the initiative of Sweden on adopting updated resolution 2427 (2018), on children and armed conflict. By joining as a co-sponsor, Ukraine once again underscores its commitments on protecting children in situations of armed conflict.

I am about to deliver a statement in my national capacity, but I also would like to highlight that Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

It is regrettable that, since the first Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict (see S/PV.3896), which was held in 1998, children have continued to be disproportionately affected in situations of armed conflict. As documented in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465), the scale of the violations committed against children is extremely alarming. Behind the data lies enormous human sorrow, which impacts children's lives and causes long-term psychological trauma, thereby making violence and insecurity permanent features of their everyday lives.

Let me therefore echo other speakers who took the floor before me by saying that the right thing to do in the face of these grim facts is to intensify our common efforts to ensure enhanced protection for children in armed conflict. In that context, enhanced cooperation by the United Nations with regional and subregional organizations at all stages of the conflict cycle could make a substantive contribution.

It is equally important that adequate levels of funding and support be provided to Governments to assist them in carrying out reintegration programmess aimed at children scarred by armed conflicts. Access to education, psychological support and rehabilitation are important building blocks in devising and implementing effective strategies for preventing the escalation of current conflicts and the emergence of new ones.

It is worth mentioning that monitoring is an important preventive mechanism that can identify risks of a sharp deterioration of a situation and make respective recommendations for early action. Unfortunately, despite existing preventive mechanisms, we witness a lack of their implementation in situations of emerging conflicts.

I would like to remind the Council that, despite the existing resolution on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights that was initiated by Ukraine, long before the armed aggression launched by the Russian Federation, the Human Rights Council was unable to use the preventive instruments on human rights violations at its disposal.

Twenty years ago at the open debate on children and armed conflict, a permanent member of the Security Council noted that

> "Leaders of military factions are using children ever more frequently in armed conflicts as cannon fodder." (*S/PV.3896, p. 11)*

Back then no one sitting at this table could imagine that the same Council member would launch a full-scale armed intervention against a neighbouring State, illegally occupy parts of its territory and resort to the same tactics it vehemently condemned, namely, shelling densely populated civilian areas and endangering the lives of civilians, including children.

As a recent example, on 28 May a 15-year-old girl died after an artillery attack by Russian forces on the city of Toretsk, in Donbas. Moreover, there are also reports that children as young as 15-years-old have been recruited into armed youth groups and are taking part in active combat as full-fledged members of combined Russian and Russia-led militant forces, including as youth reconnaissance and sabotage groups operating in the Government-controlled territory of Ukraine.

Another brutal examples is the detention of six teenagers, citizens of Ukraine, in September 2016 in the city Yasynuvata by the Russian occupation administration on charges of subversive activities. Those children remain under illegal arrest in detention facilities. The question of their release has been discussed in Minsk at the Trilateral Contact Group. Unfortunately, no progress has been achieved yet.

Approximately 200,000 boys and girls live within the 15-kilometre zone along both sides of the line of contact. They all long for peace finally to come to their land, when they can go to school without worrying that their classes could be interrupted by sudden artillery shelling and be able to take a walk in the fields or forests without fear of booby traps or mines.

This conflict has already claimed way too many lives, including those of 80 innocent children on board Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17, which was shot down four years ago, in July 2014, by a Buk missile system of the Russian fifty-third Anti-Aircraft Military Brigade, which had been brought into the territory of Ukraine from the Brigade's permanent base near the city of Kursk.

Let me remind the Council that, in 2015, the Security Council draft resolution (S/2015/562) aimed at creating an international tribunal to prosecute persons responsible for the attack on Flight MH-17 was vetoed (see S/PV.7498) by a country claiming that "international legality is the main attribute of a stable world and security". That country can easily contribute to the resolution of conflicts by putting an end to its practices of constantly and deliberately undermining the international legal system, abandoning its aggressive policies, withdrawing its troops from the occupied territories of neighbouring States and ceasing to flood the region with heavy weapons.

On our part, Ukraine has always been consistent in its policy of ensuring the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. With the endorsement and ratification of basic documents such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, as well as the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles, Ukraine has fully committed itself to the protection of the rights of children. We also continue to attach great importance to the Safe School Declaration, a framework to ensure better protection for schools and students. The Government of Ukraine intends to endorse the Declaration after completing the necessary internal procedures.

We note the absence in the report of the Secretary-General to a reference to the situation concerning Ukranian children affected by the conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine. Such a situation reflects the efforts of the Government of Ukraine to protect and save the lives of the children impacted by the armed aggression. Ukraine pays special attention to the reintegration of almost 240,000 children out of around 1.7 million internally displaced persons.

As a member of the Council during the two previous years, Ukraine strove to highlight the preventive role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We welcome the adoption today of resolution 2427 (2018), which will allocate greater powers to the Special Representative to implement her role in conflict prevention. We are encouraged by the approach just set out by Ms. Virginia Gamba when she said that we must "move to an era of prevention". That is fully in line with the general vision of the Secretary-General on the reform of the peace and security pillar based on the concept of the prevention of conflict. It is evident that preventive diplomacy represents a major tool that the United Nations should deploy more.

Ukraine, as an initiator of the aforementioned resolution of the Human Rights Council on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights, firmly believes that without a systematic approach to prevention throughout the entire Organization, we will not be able to succeed in preventing new conflicts or the resumption of old ones. In matters of preventing conflicts and gross violations of human rights, the speed and determination of the United Nations are crucial. In 1994, in Rwanda, and later in Srebrenica, the United Nations failed to react promptly to prevent genocide. In 2014, neither the leadership of the United Nations at the time nor the members of the Security Council managed to stop Russia's military aggression and occupation of Crimea and Donbas.

Finally, I would like to close my statement with a quote of a notable Swedish scientist, Alfred Nobel: "Good wishes alone will not ensure peace". It seems like this is the right time to stop enjoying ourselves or, as they say in English, this is the right time to stop having a ball.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): The fact that you have been sitting here for three hours, Mr. Prime Minister, demonstrates how seriously you take the issue and how high your delegation places the issue of children and armed conflict on your agenda. I would also like to congratulate you on the consensual adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which, if my information is correct, now has 98 sponsors. I believe that you will hit the record number of 100 by the end of the day.

I would also like to commend the three briefers today. Virginia Gamba has been working tirelessly on this issue for many years and we support her. Her mandate needs support. I also highly appreciate her close cooperation with UNICEF. I praise Henrietta Fore and UNICEF for the work they have been doing on youth, in addition to the cooperation that I mentioned.

I also thank the third briefer. She offered a very impressive demonstration of what she has gone through in Colombia. Like my French colleagues earlier today, I would like to highlight the need for civil society initiators, of which there are many in Colombia. Germany has been trying to help to promote the process in Colombia. One of our project partners is Benposta, which is a charity that houses former child soldiers and adults affected by violence. Through contributions to the United Nations Post-Conflict Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Colombia, Germany is supporting two projects that seek to reintegrate young former combatants of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and to prevent new recruitment.

While Germany aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, I should like to make four brief points.

First, we commend the Secretary-General and his annual report (S/2018/465), which is a key document and tool for implementing the children and armed conflict agenda. While there have been some positive developments — we heard from the representative of Côte d'Ivoire about what happened in his country, while the Sudan and other countries have adopted action plans — overall, when we look at the message conveyed by the report, it is rather devastating.

The Prime Minister of Aruba, representing the Netherlands, said earlier that what we are witnessing is eroding respect for humanitarian law. Like others, she was shocked by the figures that you, Mr. President, mentioned at the beginning of your statement. Thus, there is much work to do, and it must remain on the agenda of the Security Council, which also leads to something that was noted earlier by our French colleague, and that is the importance of raising public awareness by having the discussion here. As the representative of Ethiopia, among others, said, we have to include child protection in armed conflict in country resolutions and mandate child protection advisers in missions. In all mandates of peacekeeping operations, we must keep children and armed conflict on the agenda. I would also like to highlight one point that has been made by several speakers. We have to underline and work on accountability. We have to prevent impunity for those who commit grave violations of human rights in that context.

Secondly, and something Ms. Gamba also highlighted, there are many non-State actors and parties involved in conflicts across borders. We therefore totally support the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's efforts to work across borders with regional organizations, because we believe that in doing so she can receive joint responses to respond to cross-border challenges, for instance through joint prevention strategies, joint standards for training and joint responses to reintegration needs.

Thirdly, we support Sweden's focus on prevention. That is key. The reintegration of former child soldiers is part of a strategy to resolve conflicts and preserve peace, which means that reintegration programmes are key. They need to include gender aspects in order to be effective for boys and girls alike. We also share the view that funding for reintegration must be predictable, sustained and flexible. Germany has supported long-term projects focusing on vulnerable groups in society, including former child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Fourthly, effective prevention goes beyond reintegration programmes and needs to focus on education. Earlier, my British colleague highlighted the need for and underlined the right to education and what we are trying to achieve with Sustainable Development Goal 4. Education is also key to prevention. In 2011 and 2012, when Germany last sat on the Security Council, we made children and armed conflict a top priority of our time here. We commit to keeping it on the agenda when we are a member of the Council next year and the year after. We are committed to further strengthening the link between child protection and prevention. We see prevention as a cross-cutting issue in the Council's work. We will continue the discussion that our Swedish friends have started and use the momentum from this year's debate and the upcoming high-level meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace to keep the topic on the agenda.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Skoknic Tapia (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We sincerely thank Sweden and you, Mr. Prime Minister, for convening this open debate on the protection of children in armed conflict and its impact on the prevention and maintenance of peace. We particularly appreciate the forward-looking focus of this debate.

My delegation also appreciates the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) and the briefings we have heard this morning by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Ms. Yenny Londoño of Colombia, a country that is so dear to all of us.

Chile associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and of Argentina, on behalf of the group of States endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration.

Faced with the multidimensional nature of conflicts and the increase in and persistence of violations of children's rights, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the actions of extremist groups that victimize the most vulnerable groups, the international system as a whole must act preventively and decisively. We agree that it is time to stop the onset of future conflict.

We therefore echo the call of the international community to go further in its resolve and action to protect children who have been victims of conflict in order to guarantee them a better future that will allow them to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals established in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and lasting peace. As concrete measures, we urge States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to support the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration. We attach importance to maintaining child protection advisers in peacekeeping operations and to considering new appointments where such advising is required. We also underscore birth registration as a means of proof to prevent the recruitment of children and to ensure their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

We consider it relevant to include the issue of children in peace negotiations, ceasefires and mediation and support processes for sustaining peace, and to ensure that peacekeeping contingents receive adequate training in the promotion and protection of human rights. We reiterate the importance of combating impunity and prosecuting and punishing those responsible for heinous crimes against children. In the absence of such capacity or willingness, it is the task of the International Criminal Court to address crimes under the Rome Statute. In addition, we must ensure predictable, sustained and flexible financing for the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict so that child protection actors can create viable alternatives to military life and prevent their re-recruitment.

In conclusion, Chile believes that the international community cannot and should not accept the violation of children's rights anywhere or under any circumstances. Ensuring a peaceful global society requires that priority be given to the protection of its children and the development of conflict prevention and resolution strategies in order to achieve sustainable and lasting peace that will guarantee future peace for all.

The President: Before moving on, I want to really express the appreciation of Sweden for the strong commitment and engagement of everyone during the debate this morning. It is sometimes tempting to express that commitment through very long statements, as we know. I just have to remind speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

To that end, let me take the opportunity to remind speakers that the presidency will use the flashing lights on the collars of the microphones to remind speakers that it is time to sum up and bring their remarks to a close. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform representatives that we will be carrying on this open debate through the lunch hour as we have a large number of speakers to listen to this afternoon.

I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and your Government for convening this very important open debate and for your ongoing commitment to the Colombian conflict, which, as Council members were able to see first hand today with the emotional participation of my compatriot, Ms. Yenny Londoño, is a flesh-and-blood reality in many conflict affected countries. I welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UNICEF, with whom we have been working very closely for a long time.

As stated in the concept note (S/2018/625, annex), the protection and care of children who have been affected by armed conflict are fundamental to achieving sustainable peace and successful reintegration is the cornerstone of any peace process.

Colombia has been no exception. The situation of children has been particularly difficult in recent decades. Of the more than 8 million victims of the armed conflict, almost 39 per cent have been children and adolescents, which is an awful and very high figure. Between 2013 and 2018, 410,934 children were recorded as victims of the conflict and are on their way to reparation.

We are therefore grateful for the annual report presented by the Special Representative (S/2018/465), which acknowledges the progress achieved thanks to the peace process and removes the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo as a recruiting group from its annexes, following its transformation into a political party. We consider that good news because it allows our institutions to continue to work to strengthen strategies that seek to create environments and spaces for prevention and protection, in particular in rural parts of Colombia, which Yenny spoke about this morning.

I would also like to share with the Council our experience with the coordinated work we have been doing with the Office of the Special Representative in recent years, which has involved a coordinated effort among Governments and could be used in other areas of the world. In May, in Bogotá, we were able to hear about comparable experiences in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Colombia, which helped us identify challenges and possibles solutions.

Council members and the Swedish delegation, which follows this issue closely, can continue to count on Colombia's commitment during the implementation of the post-conflict phase, in particular with regard to indigenous children and those of African descent, as well as children living in marginalized areas. As Yenny said, we have to keep working to provide, if not her, at least her daughter, and all children affected by various conflicts, with a better future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I have the honour to speak on behalf Latvia, Lithuania and my own country, Estonia.

We fully align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

We would like to thank Sweden for convening this open debate and all the briefers for their presentations.

Armed conflicts continue to have a horrific impact on children and, as stated in the Secretary-General's latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465), last year the situation was one of the worst in recent memory. Children are being killed or maimed, recruited as child soldiers and used as human shields. Their schools are being attacked, they are sexually abused, detained, abducted, separated from their families and denied humanitarian access.

On the other hand, there are a few optimistic developments. Intensive United Nations engagement with armed groups in the Central African Republic and Nigeria resulted in the signing of action plans to release children and prevent their future recruitment. Sudan made progress in the implementation of the action plan. Mali endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. Those positive steps, however, are not sufficient.

States and the international community bear a responsibility to prevent violations and to protect children and others who are most vulnerable to the detrimental impact of conflict. It is clear that the way we treat children affected by armed conflict has a strong impact on their future well-being, their development as individuals and, ultimately, on communities as a whole. We as the international community need to do more to bridge the gap between protection of children and conflict prevention. These prevention efforts should be guided by the necessity to ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. In that regard, we first and foremost call on all States who have not yet done so to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

In line with the Secretary-General's agenda on prevention, we also acknowledge the need to receive early warning signs from the ground. Here, civil society can play a vital role. For prevention to be truly efficient, however, States and ultimately the international community need to take sufficient and timely action. Children's involvement in peacemaking, peacebuilding and transitional justice processes should also not be overlooked.

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are also among the Member States that have endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in furtherance of their commitment to taking further steps to protect children.

In order to create sustainable and resilient societies, it is important to offer all children affected by conflict long-term support for reintegration into society. Also, in line with the motto of the Sustainable Development Goals of leaving no one behind, we need to make sure that children recruited as soldiers or otherwise involved in armed forces or groups receive the necessary support, including psychological support to facilitate their reintegration into a normal life. An important and indispensable element here is the provision of education to all children, including all girls, without exception. We need to build community and family-support capacities and skill-development opportunities, without which those children will not be able to rebuild their lives. We must remember to treat children as victims first, not as perpetrators, and to avoid at any cost the double victimization of children by detaining them for their former association with armed forces or groups.

Finally, allow me to stress that conflict resolution and sustainable peacebuilding involves the vital element of accountability. That includes fighting against impunity for violations and abuses that have been perpetrated towards children. That obligation lies primarily with States, whose capacity to enact appropriate national legislation to criminalize grave violations against children should be assisted. As a last resort, upon the inability or unwillingness to prosecute crimes, we continue to support the important role of the International Criminal Court.

It is important for us as the international community as a whole and as individual States to do our utmost to not let down the children that are being affected by conflict. By protecting them, we are protecting our common future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Moragas Sánchez (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to start by thanking the Prime Minister of Sweden for his presence in today's important debate. I also welcome the Special Representative, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Ms. Yenny Londoño, whose presence here demonstrates the importance of working with non-State actors and investing in reintegration.

The Swedish delegation is doing an excellent job chairing the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We congratulate Sweden on this invaluable contribution and for the consensus adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which my country is proud to have co-sponsored.

My country aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, as well as that delivered by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the group of countries endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration. We would like to add a few remarks in our national capacity.

The issue of children and armed conflict is much more than an agenda item of the Council. It represents a collective responsibility of Members of the United Nations and as human beings. Confronted with the recruitment of minors, the bombing of schools and hospitals, abductions, violations, the killing and maiming of children, and the denial of humanitarian access, we must be inflexible and demand strict compliance with international law. I would like to focus on four issues.

First of all, I stress the importance of preserving existing institutional capacities in peace operations in order to monitor, report and respond to grave violations against children. Indeed, if we wish to secure an accurate and credible list of those responsible for that type of violation and abuse, we need to maintain and strengthen child protection advisers. We cannot expect results from this mandate if the right tools are not in place. We must also pay special attention to the cross-border component of many violations and their connection to the trafficking of children.

Secondly, we welcome the preventive approach of the resolution adopted earlier. Safeguarding children's rights and ensuring their protection from the moment there is a risk of conflict can contribute to the solution. Post-conflict protection must also not be neglected. Therefore, we agree that implementing an action plan must entail establishing frameworks to prevent future violations and abuses, including mechanisms to empower children and young people. There are also positive examples, such as those of Colombia or Nepal, that show that a timely commitment on the part of the parties in this area can substantially contribute to the creation of confidence-building measures within the framework of a new peace process. Therefore, we believe that this agenda must be at the core of prevention efforts and sustainable conflict resolution.

Thirdly, we express our support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF and specialized civil society organizations for their commitment to reintegration. There is little point in achieving the demobilization of children if they do not find an alternative to end the spiral of violence. Perhaps as donors we should introduce that notion in our contributions.

Finally, we all know that the denial or hindering of humanitarian access particularly affects children. They are also especially vulnerable to the destruction of civilian infrastructure that provides basic services, such as medical and educational facilities. My country prioritizes those two issues because they have very negative short- and long-term consequences and they are an example of the multiple challenges faced in the sphere of protection, humanitarian emergency services and the development of peaceful societies.

In April, we organized a retreat focused on the protection of health care in armed conflicts. We are now working on a General Assembly initiative that will contribute towards the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). Moreover, we are signatories of the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and the Safe Schools Declaration.

In this regard, I would like to finish by saying that I must remind the Council that Spain will host the third Safe Schools Conference at the end of May 2019, less than a year from now, following the conferences previously organized by Norway and Argentina. We will work to expand the number of countries that support the Safe Schools Declaration and to deepen best practices, including those focusing on women's and girls' access to education.

Let me now conclude with a final point. The Security Council and all Member States must make use of all the tools at their disposal to ensure that serious violations of children's rights are investigated, that those responsible are identified, and that there is accountability. I repeat: investigation, identification and accountability. In our view, this is the best tool for prevention, and it is the least that the victims deserve.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Ms. Bavdaž Kuret (Slovenia): I would like to begin by thanking Sweden for organizing today's open debate and the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2018/465). Slovenia aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and the representative of Argentina on the Safe Schools Declaration. Moreover, I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Today's debate marks 20 years since the first Security Council open debate on the subject of children and armed conflict, in June 1998 (see S/PV.3896), and some progress can be observed since the issue was put on the United Nations agenda. Despite the progress achieved, the findings documented in the Secretary-General's latest report are concerning: an increase in grave violations committed against children, use of landmines and cluster munitions, the deployment of children as human shields and suicide bombers, the cross-border nature of the violations, continuous attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access — all of this is deeply concerning and must be urgently addressed.

Slovenia welcomes the continued engagement with different regional actors and believes that specific provisions for the protection of children should continue to be included in all relevant United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as political and peacebuilding missions, including by means of the deployment of child-protection advisers. Slovenia remains committed to lessening the burden of children affected by armed conflicts. In 2018, we have supported, inter alia, projects for Syrian refugees in Jordan aiming to empower Syrian children and their mothers with social rehabilitation for children through schooling and psychosocial workshops focused on developing life skills. Mine-risk education programmes for Syrian refugee children in the northern Jordanian provinces were implemented by the Slovenian-based International Trust Fund Enhancing Human Security to raise awareness about landmines and explosive remnants of war and promoting safety precautions with a view to minimizing the number of victims when the displaced return home.

We have heard about the importance of integrating the protection, rights and well-being of children in peace processes. In this context, empowering children to become actors for peace is of utmost importance. We note the release of over 10,000 children in 2017. It is essential not only that children be returned to their communities, but also that their overall well-being be comprehensively addressed, giving them a future without fear of re-recruitment or threat of grave violations against them.

For the last 15 years, Slovenia has supported the project entitled Our Rights, which is a human rights and children's rights education project promoting a culture of peace, non-discrimination and tolerance anchored in respect for human rights. Since its beginning, more than 190,000 children in 26 countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa were included. In 2017, Slovenia launched a school- and peer-mediation project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where teachers and students are trained to practice mediation techniques in schools, which are becoming vocal promoters of dialogue, tolerance, reconciliation, human rights and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Monitoring and accurate and timely reporting are crucial for ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism is therefore a key mechanism of the United Nations children-protection mandate. We believe that the Security Council should impose further targeted measures on persistent perpetrators of grave violations. Slovenia is convinced that the work of the International Criminal Court and other international criminal tribunals adds to breaking the culture of impunity.

As it is cross-cutting, the issue of children and armed conflict needs a comprehensive approach, including through such initiatives as the Paris Principles, the Oslo Safe School Declaration and the Vancouver Principles. Slovenia would like to call on Member States that have not yet done so yet, to join these initiatives, as they foster the implementation of the framework set up by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

In conclusion, it is our duty and responsibility to do our utmost to prevent children from suffering, regardless of whether a situation is on the Security Council's agenda or not. The adoption today of the new resolution 2427 (2018) is an important step in this direction, which is why Slovenia joined in co-sponsoring the draft.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I too would like to begin by thank the Swedish presidency for convening today's debate and the Prime Minister of Sweden for presiding over it earlier. We also thank the briefers for their insightful coverage of this important issue.

The dreams and hopes of hundreds of thousands of children continue to be shattered by conflict. Then there are also those who may never even get a chance to dream. Children become victims of unimaginable horror everyday. The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465) confirms these horrors. Children are killed and maimed, abducted to fight, sexually abused and denied humanitarian aid.

All parties to armed conflict have the responsibility to protect children from violence. And yet, all too often, violations and abuses of international law affecting children remain rampant. This disturbing trend shows no sign of abating. Last year, we witnessed a significant increase in the incidence of abuse of children, making 2017 another nightmare year for children trapped in conflict and violence.

Despite some progress, the scale and the intensity of today's conflict is stretching our capacity to protect these children. In conflict zones and occupied territories, we are witnessing a deeply troubling breakdown in humanity and diminishing respect for human life and dignity. Children are often at the heart of conflict and are in consequence directly targeted. Their homes and schools are destroyed and food and water supplies deliberately cut off. Under foreign occupation they are subjected to arbitrary arrests, detention and torture — and mass blinding, too, as the use of pellet guns by occupation forces in occupied Jammu and Kashmir testifies. According to the recent report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Kashmir, there were "multiple cases of children under 18 years" being arbitrarily detained and tortured under the cover of a black law, the so-called Public Security Act.

The plight of children in Palestine, Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Myanmar and Yemen should galvanize the international community to find new and effective ways to protect those most vulnerable. The goal of protecting children can best be achieved by preventing the outbreak of armed conflict in the first place. The most effective way to protect children is by preventing and resolving conflicts, ending foreign occupation and, of course, by sustaining peace where peace is possible. That must be our top priority and the Council's.

My Government remains fully alive to its commitments with regard to protecting children. Pakistan was one of the earliest signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, and we have established a national commission for child welfare and development that coordinates, monitors and facilitates its implementation. Last year, we also established a national commission on the rights of children.

Lastly, I would like to say that 20 years ago, Graça Machel asked the international community to come together and address the plight of children in conflict (see A/51/306), and proposed the appointment of a special representative for children in armed conflict. Pakistan fully supports the appointment and the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, but we also believe that its mandate should not become a tool for achieving political objectives. The legal parameters of the mandate, as provided for in the relevant Security Council resolutions, must be respected. We hope that principle will be kept in mind in future reports.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to thank the Swedish presidency for convening today's open debate and for its capable leadership of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I also want to congratulate the Council collectively on its adoption today of resolution 2427 (2018), of which we were a sponsor.

Italy aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representatives of Canada and Argentina, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and the group of countries endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, respectively. I would also like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

According to the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2018/465), in the past year there has been an alarming increase in the number of children affected by armed conflict and the severity of the violations committed against them. New armed groups have emerged, while the cross-border nature of conflicts makes it harder to monitor and report all the abuses. We would therefore like to commend the work being done by the United Nations in this area. Despite the devastating number of violations in 2017, more than 10,000 children were formally released from armed groups and forces, thanks mainly to the advocacy efforts of the United Nations system, accomplished first through the country visits of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Council's Working Group, and secondly through the Secretary-General's political urgings in his annual reports. In that regard, we welcome the approach applied to the list and hope it will encourage more parties to armed conflicts to put in place measures to improve the protection of children, including by signing and implementing action plans. The third way has been through UNICEF's crucial role in monitoring and reporting on the ground, together with the work of humanitarian workers and non-governmental organizations.

In order to break the cycle of violations affecting children, we must take a systematic and coherent approach based on prevention, accountability and reintegration. With regard first to prevention, we should continue to encourage as many States as possible to ratify the relevant international instruments, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to promote their implementation and enforcement. We encourage the endorsement of initiatives such as the Paris and Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, with a view to making significant improvements in children's lives. It is also important to ensure that peacekeeping and political missions have the necessary means to monitor, report and respond to grave violations. To that end, we must ensure that the positions of child protection advisers are duly staffed and budgeted. Finally, United Nations personnel should receive specialized predeployment training on children in armed conflict, a practice that should be scaled up and become standard. In Italy, all the courses offered to peacekeepers each year by our Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Units include modules on respect for human rights, international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

Secondly, with regard to accountability, it is difficult to rebuild broken communities and begin the process of social healing without ensuring that violations and abuses are prosecuted and victims receive reparations. At the national level, States should adopt, develop and implement the legal and administrative measures needed to ensure that all violations against children are criminalized and their perpetrators brought to justice, in compliance with the provisions of the relevant international instruments. At the international level, we encourage the Security Council to include in its sanctions regimes specific listing criteria for grave violations of children in armed conflict. Lastly, the International Criminal Court has an essential role to play in holding perpetrators accountable for their crimes.

Thirdly, turning to reintegration, the international community's attention must not cease once children have been released from armed groups. Exposure to the cruelties of war and the battlefield has a serious and often irreparable impact on the physical and psychological well-being of children involved in armed conflicts. They must be successfully reintegrated into society and helped to overcome the stigma and blame wrongfully attached to them. That is unfortunately the last and most frequently forgotten link in the chain. At the Arria Formula meeting we organized last year, Joy Bishara, a student kidnapped by Boko Haram, testified from her personal experience that if children are not reintegrated, they will see no alternative other than re-recruitment to armed groups. As the successful example of Colombia has shown, all peace agreements must include specific provisions on this issue if they are to be sustainable. We need to connect all the dots in this chain as we strive together to build long-term peace, stability and development.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Verdier (Argentina): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the following States, which have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the State of Palestine, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, Yemen and my own country, Argentina. We welcome the holding of today's open debate on "Protecting children today to prevent conflicts tomorrow", organized by Sweden, given the urgency of ending the vicious cycle of conflicts and protecting children from their effects.

The Safe Schools Declaration is an intergovernmental political commitment aimed at protecting and continuing education during armed conflict. It includes a pledge to implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Education is not just a human right but an essential protection mechanism for children living in conflict, helping them to reach their potential and contribute to building stronger, more resilient and more peaceful communities. Continued access to safe education can help protect children and young people from the worst effects of armed conflict and can also help to prevent the emergence of new conflicts, while protecting the education sector as far as possible from the effects of war can also help countries recover in the post-conflict phase.

Since the first International Conference on Safe Schools was held in Oslo in 2015, 76 States have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. We welcome Djibouti, Mali, the United Kingdom, Germany and Peru, which all recently endorsed the Declaration to join the Safe Schools community. At the Buenos Aires Conference in March 2017, representatives from States, international organizations and civil society had the opportunity to share experiences, raise awareness, and exchange expertise in an effort to find practical solutions to the real problems faced by students and teachers in conflict situations. Numerous States shared examples of implementation that demonstrated the Declaration's tangible impact, highlighted in the Conference's outcome report. We welcome the announcement made by Spain that it will host the third Conference on Safe Schools in 2019, and look forward to seeing all Member States represented there.

We take note of the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465) and wish to convey our profound concern about the ongoing grave violations against children in conflict, including threats, attacks and the military use of educational infrastructure, which leave children vulnerable. We therefore echo the report's recommendation for all States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration — a call that has also been made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, as well as the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We take this opportunity to express our special appreciation for the Secretary General's support for the Safe Schools Declaration.

At the same time, we note the analysis of the report by Human Rights Watch, which demonstrates that there has been a global decrease in the military use of schools. The report shows that, among the States that have endorsed the Declaration, the military use of schools has decreased significantly, by almost 50 per cent on average since 2015. We are encouraged that the Declaration makes such a difference on the ground and that endorsing States are implementing it. However, among States that have not endorsed the Declaration, military uses of schools have actually increased.

In conclusion, we reiterate our call on all Member States, and particularly on all members of the Council, to recognize the Declaration as a tool to protect children and to join the Safe Schools Declaration community by endorsing and implementing the Declaration.

I shall now deliver a few brief remarks in my national capacity as representative of Argentina.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Argentina would like to thank the Government of Sweden in particular for organizing this open debate and its work at the helm of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We also are grateful for the briefings by Special Representative Virginia Gamba, Executive Director Fore and Ms. Londoño. In that regard, I would like to express our appreciation and firm support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and express our gratitude for the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465).

We share the deep concern about the significant increase in the number of violations recorded in 2017 by State actors and non-State actors alike as part of the intensification and changing dynamics of armed conflicts. In that regard, Argentina reaffirms its unwavering commitment to all initiatives to prevent, avoid and halt serious violations of children's rights in armed conflicts. We are pleased to note that, since the previous open debate of the Security Council on the issue (see S/PV.8082), in October 2017, we have endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and co-sponsored today's resolution 2427 (2018).

In conclusion, Argentina reiterates once again the urgent need for the international community to agree and implement measures to increase pressure on State and non-State actors that commit violations against children so as to demobilize, disassociate, rehabilitate and reintegrate children associated with such groups, in cooperation with their respective communities within the framework of absolute respect for international humanitarian law, international human rights law and refugee law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Grant (Canada): Let me begin by thanking Sweden for convening this much-needed open debate and congratulating, you, Sir, on your very capable presidency of the Security Council for the month of July.

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict — a network of 42 Member States representing all five regional groups of the United Nations.

We welcome the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465), and we thank him for his ongoing efforts to shine a light on the terrible situations affecting children in armed conflict around the world. Effective monitoring and reporting are key to the prevention of and the response to grave violations of child rights. The Group of Friends wishes to reiterate its strong support for the Special Representative and the continued independence and impartiality of the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism, established in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005).

We commend Ms. Londoño's courage in sharing her story with us today. We also thank United Nations bodies, such as UNICEF, which work to protect and promote the rights of children in armed conflict worldwide.

The report of the Secretary-General illustrates in stark detail how armed conflict often strips away — in practice, if not in principle — the protections that children are afforded by families and society. It shows us how children are victimized and how their victimization helps perpetuate conflict and poverty. We are encouraged by those armed forces and groups that have signed action plans in the past year to help make violations against children a problem of the past. Notwithstanding those important steps, it is our collective responsibility to do better. On behalf of the Group of Friends, I would like to highlight four areas that merit attention by the United Nations and all Member States.

First and foremost, in order to strengthen the links between child protection and conflict prevention, we must strengthen our resolve to better protect children in armed conflict. All parties to armed conflict must fully comply with their obligations under the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. Additionally, there are several practical protection tools that Member States have the option of using, notably the Safe Schools Declaration; the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict; the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, known as the Paris Principles; the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups; and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. We call upon Member States to further strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, including through ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as consideration of the endorsement of those commitments.

Secondly, Ms. Londoño's briefing shows us the importance of integrating the protection, rights and well-being of children in peace processes. Accordingly, we welcome the launch of a process to compile practical guidance on child protection issues for peace processes. We urge the drafters to specifically consider the needs of the girl child, whose particular challenges are too often forgotten or overlooked.

Thirdly, we recognize that children affected by armed conflict are not defined by their victimhood alone. When they are successfully reintegrated into their families and communities, they can be an important source of resilience. To that end, we pledge to elevate and echo the voices of child victims, especially the voice of the girl child. We also support strengthened accountability for all perpetrators of child rights violations and commend organizations, such as Justice Rapid Response, that offer surge capacities for that purpose.

Fourthly, the Special Representative pointed out in a recent statement that we must work together to leave no child affected by conflict behind so as to fully realize the potential of the Sustainable Development Goals. To make progress towards achieving that goal, we must address the cross-border nature of violations by supporting the development of regional, subregional and national prevention plans and strategies. We must also ensure greater awareness and understanding of the unique challenges associated with children in armed conflict though training and advocacy.

(*spoke in French*)

Let me make several additional remarks in my capacity as the representative of Canada.

As a firm advocate for respect for international humanitarian law and international protection frameworks, Canada has been actively engaged in issues involving children and armed conflict for more than 20 years, including when Canada previously served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council from 1999 to 2000. Together with Security Council members and other States Members, we worked tirelessly to ensure the children and armed conflict item was placed at the core of the Council's agenda. Canada's long-standing chairmanship of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict also has its origin in our commitment to bringing parties concerned together to achieve shared goals. We continue to take concrete steps today to strengthen international protection frameworks. Canada recently launched the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. To date, the voluntary and non-binding Principles have now been endorsed by 65 States. In order to pursue collective action against the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers, Canada is developing guidelines for States having endorsed them to implement the Vancouver Principles.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada encourages those States that have not yet endorsed the Vancouver Principles or the complementary Paris Principles to consider doing so without delay. Despite those important steps, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General, children continue to be used for combat and denied humanitarian access in such places as South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. Canada is particularly appalled by accounts that Rohingya children in Myanmar and Bangladesh have been victims of killings, rape and sexual assault, and have been used as human shields and mine-sweepers. This has to stop and those responsible must be held accountable.

In conclusion, I strongly call upon all Member States, including the members of the Security Council, to join the growing number of countries acting to safeguard the rights of children and to protect them from violence in situations of armed conflict. It is only by working together that we will overcome these challenges.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Skinner-Kleé Arenales (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you and your delegation, Sir, on organizing this open debate on a very important issue in the field of international peace and security. The presence of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden highlights that importance.

The concept note (S/2018/625, annex) also includes guidelines for our debate and we appreciate the briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, as well as that of the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore.

Our first observation is about the importance of carrying out this debate just as we embark upon a reform of the United Nations focused mainly on prevention and sustainable peace. Those two concepts, promoted by the Secretary-General, have been supported by all Member States this year through the adoption of two resolutions this year, one in the General Assembly (resolution 72/276) and the other in the Security Council (resolution 2413 (2018)). Indeed, the protection of children is today, more than ever, essential to fostering a culture of peace, tolerance and coexistence in order to prevent conflicts in the future or, as Ms. Fore asked, what will become of children if we do not protect them?

We agree on the need to care for and assist children not only because of their vulnerability, but also because by protecting minors from all forms of violence or abuse, we are ensuring the very survival of society in conditions of stability and harmony, which in turn ensures the progress of nations in peace and security.

That is why we are very concerned that, in spite of having legal instruments destined to protect children, we still witness armed conflicts that perpetuate serious abuses against girls and boys, as the Secretary-General mentions in his recent report (S/2018/465). We are utterly shocked by the indiscriminate use of chemical weapons and internationally banned ordnance against children, schools and hospitals, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, demonstrating heinous brutality against defenceless and innocent civilian populations.

We reiterate our strongest condemnation of all these abject acts and we call on not only States, the United Nations and international specialized agencies, but on every citizen of goodwill so that, together, we can take responsibility for generating and ensuring that children can enjoy their childhood without prejudice or exclusion, without violence or wars. This is a direct and inescapable responsibility of the Council. It means that the Member States must totally reject any practice that, even when it does not violate international humanitarian law, violates universal human dignity, especially when the victims are children separated from their parents due to inhumane policies that traumatize them and, by all accounts, is shameful. We call for the complete cessation of these heinous practices that evoke historical chapters of crimes against humanity.

As the Council is aware, Guatemala was affected by a fratricidal conflict that lasted more than four decades, the tragic consequences of which disproportionately affected women and children. Since the signing of the peace accords more than 20 years ago, we have succeeded in building a more democratic and inclusive society with greater respect for human rights. We recall with gratitude how in 2002, with the support of UNICEF, the National Commission for the Search for Disappeared Children, enabled the documented reunification of more than 1,000 children with their families.

In conclusion, we think that we come to this debate with the intelligence of instilling hope for building a better future, by appealing to the entire human race to achieve the effective protection of children. It is the Council's primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security and, as such, the prevention of conflicts and child protection are urgent tasks.

That is why we decided to sponsor resolution 2427 (2018), adopted and promoted by your delegation, Mr. President, as it prioritizes the protection of children, promotes prevention and urges all humanity to support States and intergovernmental organizations with a renewed commitment to cooperating in ensuring the respect of children's rights and thus creating a protective environment that protects them from the scourge of violence and abuse in order to safeguard future generations from new conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Allow me to begin by extending my deepest appreciation to the Government of Sweden for its leadership in convening this open debate and to the Permanent Representative for remaining in the Chamber during lunch to listen to the statements of countries that are not members of the Security Council. It is not always done. I would also like to thank the briefers for their insightful presentations.

It is deeply regrettable that the number of violations against children in armed conflicts has increased greatly over the previous year. The Government of Japan strongly condemns the perpetrators of such violations against children and calls for accountability to end impunity.

The international community must protect children affected by armed conflicts and prevent future violence. It is crucial to ensure humanitarian access and long-term support for these children — not only to heal their wounds but also to give them hope for a peaceful future. It is in that belief that the Government of Japan became the first donor to the humanitarian window of the Fund to End Violence against Children, launched by the Secretary-General in 2016. By supporting the Fund's 12 projects in Nigeria and Uganda, we hope to serve the human security interests of children by protecting and empowering them. Let me share a story of a child who receives assistance through one of the Fund's projects in Uganda.

As described in the report of the Secretary-General, many children have been recruited and used in the armed conflict and numerous cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against boys and girls took place in South Sudan. Unaccompanied children have fled their homelands, among them a 17-year-old girl and her 15-year-old sister, who fled South Sudan to a refugee camp in Uganda. Having lost her father and having been abandoned by her mother, she is now seven months' pregnant and soon to be a single mother. Stress from displacement and her situation has also deprived her of schooling, and she now suffers from hepatitis B. She sells her own food to take care of medical expenses. A skill-development activity in the project aims to provide her with a stable income for her baby, her sister and herself. Regular home visits by the project staff allow her to share her struggles and concerns.

This is just one of so many children suffering the consequences of violence in conflict settings. By creating safe environments, supporting parents and ensuring adequate incomes through vocational education, the Fund is also preventing future violence.

The Government of Japan calls on others to join the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children and invest in solutions to address violence against children in armed conflicts through the Fund. We should have faith in the strength of children and empower them as our partners in the peace process. Together, we must end the cycle of violence and build a peaceful and sustainable future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mr. Rosselli Frieri (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Swedish delegation for having convened today's meeting, and Ms. Gamba, Henrietta Fore and Yenny Londoño for their briefings today.

My country welcomes the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which we co-sponsored.

The numbers speak for themselves: in just a year, the number of cases of violations against children has gone up by more than 50 per cent. We are talking about 21,000 cases of violations of the rights of children, 10,000 of them involving children killed by aerial or artillery strikes, usually against schools, hospitals or civilian infrastructure. This is a proven fact and, if that were not enough, humanitarian assistance, as the Special Representative so clearly stated in her briefing, is also being denied in Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, where the delivery of humanitarian assistance for children is being hampered.

We wish to highlight here the role of the Special Representative, who can count on our full support — support that we urge the international community once again to continue to provide. We see great value in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465), particularly the list annexed thereto. But in order for it to be effective, it must remain independent and impartial, without any interference by Member States or unnecessary accommodation with respect to any Member State, which would hinder the capacity to respond to and prevent violations against children.

We often speak of accountability, which is the ultimate objective in order to that those who commit such atrocities are brought to justice. I should like simply to recall that while those who fire missiles bear responsibility, so do those who provide them with weapons or the logistical support necessary for them to carry out such terrible acts.

Allow me to conclude with a quote from Nelson Mandela:

> "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children".

This can be either high praise or strong condemnation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Giacomelli da Silva (Brazil): I wish to thank Sweden for having convened this important debate and the briefers for their presentations.

Brazil associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Safe Schools Declaration.

This year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465) is especially alarming, since it points to a large increase in the number of verified violations. Brazil resolutely condemns these violations and reiterates that all parties must protect children and other civilians, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Both children of war and child soldiers are vulnerable groups and as such need to receive special protection.

Brazil also reiterates its concern at reports of the detention of children on national security grounds during armed conflicts. Apart from raising legal and moral issues, these measures are counterproductive, as they envisage children allegedly associated with armed groups as security threats rather than as victims.

The violations were reported mainly in situations on the agenda of the Security Council, which has an important role to play in this regard, especially by taking into account child-protection concerns in the consideration of peace processes and peacekeeping mandates. Achieving sustainable peace requires strong support for political negotiations and preventive diplomacy. In our view, prevention is always crucial.

Based on our experience in supporting initiatives on the ground, allow me to very briefly elaborate on the importance of programmes aimed at the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers and some of the related challenges.

Brazil has been promoting the practice of capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art, as a tool for the reintegration of former child soldiers in Haiti and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Because many of those children had been separated from their families and original communities from a very early age, reintegration requires supporting them in rebuilding their sense of identity and finding a place in a peaceful social environment. It is also crucial to treat all children primarily as victims of armed conflict and prevent stigmatization by hosting communities.

There are many grass-roots initiatives similar to this one that are of paramount importance to avoid re-recruitment and to rescue children from the grip of conflict. Such initiatives could be replicated.

In concluding, let me say that today's debate is very timely and relevant. We recommend that it not remain limited to the Security Council, since structural prevention is a cross-cutting endeavour that requires contributions from all pillars of the United Nations. The Peacebuilding Commission, given its coordination mandate and unique composition, is especially well positioned to host discussions and contribute to this debate.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Van Den Akker (European Union): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

First, I would like to warmly thank today's briefers, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore and Ms. Yenny Londoño.

I would also like to thank the Swedish presidency for having organized today's debate and for its unstinting efforts as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Resolution 2427 (2018), which the Council has just adopted, provides a comprehensive framework for child protection and children's rights, well-being and empowerment throughout the conflict cycle to prevent conflict and sustain peace. I must at this stage acknowledge the indispensable role of child-protection experts working in countries affected by conflict, including child-protection advisers in United Nations peacekeeping and political missions. They do vital work in challenging environments and deserve the full support of all States Members of the United Nations.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465) sets out in detail how children in situations of armed conflict continue to be subjected to appalling violations of their human rights. The report highlights the devastating impact of a number of protracted and new crises and plays a crucial role by providing us with verified and impartial information on violations, collected through the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

But the annual report also documents the progress that has been achieved, which would not have been possible without the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and her team, UNICEF and other United Nations actors, including United Nations peacekeeping child-protection teams, and civil society. We welcome the active role that Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba has played since her appointment last year.

By protecting children and ensuring that their human rights are respected, we build more stable and peaceful societies. By properly supporting children after they have left armed forces or groups, we make them less vulnerable to re-recruitment, help to prevent the recurrence of conflict and support their reintegration into communities. This requires long-term, sustainably funded, comprehensive and gender-sensitive reintegration programmes. We must recognize that children are recruited by groups that operate across borders, and design reintegration programmes accordingly.

We cannot wait until there is peace before taking steps to protect children, but instead integrate child protection into peace processes. We therefore welcome the launch of a process to compile practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes.

Earlier this year we marked the eighteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, a crucial instrument for the protection of children. I take this opportunity to encourage all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol. All EU member States have endorsed the Paris Principles and the Paris Commitments, and I call on all States that have not yet done so to also endorse them.

The children and armed conflict agenda is a priority for the European Union. EU-funded projects provide vital assistance to children in a range of conflict situations. We support efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers, secure their release and ensure their comprehensive and successful reintegration through long-term interventions. In the EU's new Communication on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises, children associated with armed forces and groups are specifically identified as a group to be given priority for support in access to education. The EU's commitment to education in emergencies is at 8 per cent of its humanitarian aid budget in 2018 and will increase to 10 per cent as of 2019 — far above the global average.

The EU is also deeply concerned by the high rate of sexual violence against girls and boys in conflict. In 2017, the EU allocated almost €22 million in humanitarian aid for the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence worldwide.

Girls are significantly affected by recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, with some estimates indicating that as many as 40 per cent of children associated with armed forces or armed groups are female. The EU seeks to ensure that the specific obstacles to the education of girls in emergencies are fully taken into account in its activities and programming. Girls should no longer constitute the invisible side of reintegration programmes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Sweden for convening today's open debate. We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) , which Mexico co-sponsored, and we welcome the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) to help consolidate concrete actions for the protection of children and adolescents in armed conflict. We appreciate Virginia Gamba's constant commitment to her work.

Mexico, in its capacity as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, promoted the negotiation and adoption of resolution 1882 (2009) on this issue in 2009. Mexico is currently a lead country for the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children and a member of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, among other groups and initiatives that have served to continue to draw political attention so as to alleviate the suffering of those who are the future and the present of our societies. For the same reasons, we also chair the Group of Friends of Sustaining Peace.

At the national level, Mexico meets the needs of approximately 39.2 million children and adolescents through various regional and international initiatives and projects related to protection from violence, particularly in the areas of corporal punishment, sexual exploitation and abuse, bullying and disappearance, as well as other initiatives aimed at preventing and eradicating forms of violence that violate their human rights.

In addition to the work that all Members must do in our national public policies, the protection of the best interests of children and adolescents must be the priority of the United Nations and of each of its Members, agencies and sectors of its system. If we shirk this collective responsibility, we will continue to perpetuate the damage being done to children who live in insecure conditions and are twisted by conflict, the rule of law will deteriorate and the training of human capital for the future will be put at risk. The causes for the involvement of children in armed conflict are comparable to those that spark and exacerbate conflict. We need to see child protection as an essential component of prevention and development and as a central component of the sustainable peace for which we work together at the United Nations.

We welcome the calls of the Security Council and the Secretary-General for child protection measures to be integrated into peace negotiations and into plans for the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers, who have been part of armed groups, in order to ensure their protection, well-being, inclusion and empowerment. We call on the members of the Council to address this issue in a manner that cuts across all items on their agenda and to continue to strengthen the mandates of peace operations, with child protection advisers in both peacekeeping operations and special political missions, and to ensure that sanctions committees consider child protection as a central component of their mandates.

For international society and for the United Nations system, protecting the rights of children in all circumstances must be seen as an obligation. It is imperative that we turn environments of adversity into environments of opportunity for the children of the world. The path we all must take is clear and is universal: it is through prevention and through the sustainable and inclusive development to which we must aspire, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Charwath (Austria): I would like to start by thanking Sweden for convening today's debate and for its active engagement as the Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We commend the committed work of the Special Representative and her team, as well as UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the civil society organizations specializing in the topic.

We have studied the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465) and agree with him that preventing violations against children affected by conflict should be a primary concern of the international community. Our support for the Security Council's children-and-armed-conflict mandate is steadfast, and we stand behind its integrity and impartiality to list all perpetrators of grave violations against children.

Austria fully aligns itself with the statements of the European Union, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and the States that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. In my national capacity, I would like to highlight three points.

First is promoting action plans. Action plans with parties to a conflict provide the main engagement framework for the United Nations to address immediate protection concerns and as a lever to prevent future violations. We have to further promote the work with both State and non-State actors to follow up on their implementation as well as to conclude new action plans. Austria recognizes the challenges of engagement to respond to and prevent violations by non-State armed groups and continues its support for the United Nations-led dialogue.

The Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) is actively engaged in projects aimed at reducing the threat of violence against children. At present, ADC is carrying out a project for the Sudan, where participating parties in the Darfur conflict are being trained in the rights of the child. That project also supports the Child Protection Unit of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur in facilitating dialogue between the parties to the conflict.

The second point concerns protection and reintegration. Peace processes can be a vehicle for advancing child protection and for promoting reintegration and reconciliation, thereby helping to prevent the outbreak of future conflicts. Provisions on the protection of children, including their release and reintegration, should therefore form part of the early stages of ceasefire and peace negotiations.

We express our serious concern that children allegedly associated with non-State armed groups are too often perceived as a security threat and as perpetrators, rather than as victims of grave violations. While it is a priority to put in place alternatives to detention and prosecution, the monitoring and reporting on the detention of children for being associated with armed forces or groups needs to continue. We would also like to emphasize the importance of deploying designated child protection advisers to United Nations missions and of ensuring that the protection mandate remains strong and unaffected.

Thirdly, with respect to commitment and action, we encourage all States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. Attacks on schools put children at risk of injury or death. But the mere probability of attacks can lead to higher drop-out rates, as parents then tend to keep their children at home. Girls are often disproportionately impacted and are less likely to return to school even when the situation has become safer.

Austria has endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers as a measure to give priority to and further operationalize child protection within United

Nations peacekeeping, and we are currently exploring possibilities to contribute to their operationalization.

Austria has supported the development and the roll-out of the new integrated protection of civilians training materials by hosting train-the-trainer courses as part of our long-standing cooperation with the Integrated Training Service. We will continue to support the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support in developing training materials on child protection for military peacekeepers through their cooperation with the Integrated Training Service and by hosting train-the-trainer courses for troop-contributing countries.

We are struggling with new and recurring challenges regarding the protection of boys and girls who are vulnerable to violence and abuse. The international community has to maintain its strong engagement to bringing about positive change to the lives of children affected by armed conflict. The full version of this statement will be uploaded to our website.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Stener (Norway): I am speaking today on behalf of Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

Let me first thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/465), which shows a significant increase in verified violations against children. That trend can and must be reversed. First and foremost, parties to conflict must respect international humanitarian law and human rights.

I would also like to thank the Swedish presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's debate and for its work on resolution 2427 (2018), which the Council just adopted with overwhelming support. The resolution provides a comprehensive framework for mainstreaming child protection, children's rights and empowerment throughout the conflict cycle to prevent conflict and sustain peace. The Nordic countries are proud to co-sponsor this important resolution.

Protecting children and upholding their rights in situations of armed conflict is closely linked to the broader prevention agenda. It is crucial to resolve conflicts and sustain peace. Not only do violations against children during armed conflict have immediate negative impacts on individuals and their communities, but they also undermine longer-term prospects for reconciliation, reintegration and reconstruction. Children must be treated and protected as children — legally and socially — regardless of the context.

The Nordic countries are particularly concerned about the continued silence and stigma related to sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, which leads to underreporting and a lack of support for victims. We are encouraged by the Secretary-General's firm stance in that respect, including zero tolerance for violations committed by military personnel and civilians in the service of the United Nations.

It is important to strengthen the links connecting child protection, the rights of the child and conflict prevention. One of the issues that should be given priority in that regard is education, especially girls' education. In addition, more needs to be done to provide and protect education during emergencies and protracted crises. The Secretary-General's report calls for the effective implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. With Djibouti's recent endorsement, 76 States have now endorsed the Declaration. Its main purpose is to prevent the military use of schools and reduce the number of attacks on education in armed conflicts. We encourage all States to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.

Let me reiterate our strong support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Ms. Gamba is playing an essential role at the global, regional and national levels by advocating for children's protection and rights and providing practical guidance on how the agenda can be brought forward. Colombia is a good example for how child protection and children's rights, including reintegration, can be integrated into peace processes. We welcome the launch of a process to compile practical guidance for mediators and peace negotiators, as a way to operationalize today's resolution. Children involved in armed conflict require not only comprehensive support and care, but also justice. Securing accountability for conflict-related crimes involving children is of the utmost importance. In that context, we would like to recognize the important work of Justice Rapid Response.

Parties to conflict and the international community can and must do more, both to protect the increasing number of children and young people affected by armed conflict and to ensure that they are included in peacebuilding and development processes. That is for the benefit of their communities and beyond. The Nordic countries urge all United Nations Member States to ensure that children in armed conflict receive the attention and protection to which they are entitled.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza: My delegation wishes to thank the Swedish presidency for convening this special open debate on children and armed conflict, a theme to which the Holy See attaches critical importance.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) details the shocking scale and severity of violations and abuses against children in armed conflicts around the world. Although we might not be able to solve all the conflicts on the agenda of the Security Council now, we can do better in protecting the children who are suffering from their devastating consequences. The children and armed conflict agenda is an important framework to that end. It provides us with the tools to prevent all violations and abuses against children and to ensure that the perpetrators be held accountable. There is a unique consensus within the Security Council, and within the entire international community, on the issue, and we should spare no effort to implement it fully.

Among the areas where there is ample room for improvement, my delegation would like to mention three.

First is the great responsibility to act in the face of attacks on children. Sustainable Development Goal 16 commits us to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children The first step towards achieving that target is to strengthen preventive measures against human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law that are occurring against children — and, in our case today, in armed conflict.

Secondly, there is the need to prioritize the effective reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups. Children caught in armed conflict must always be treated primarily as victims, even if, under the control of armed groups, they may have factually committed crimes. Successful rehabilitation and reintegration are in the best interests not only of the child, but also of society as a whole. Children should always be part of the solution, not part of the problem. The care and rehabilitation of children saved from armed groups require adequate, long-term resources to provide them with the greatest chance for their successful reintegration into their families and society. We must assure that those children not remain hostage to the horrors that they survived.

Third is the need to guarantee the right to education for children victimized by armed conflict. A solid education is the best way to assure that the victims of today's conflicts will work to prevent those of tomorrow and be peacebuilders. Sustainable Development Goal 4 underlines the important role of children's education in reducing poverty and inequality. In that regard, through their various structures operating in most conflict zones, the Holy See and the Catholic Church are actively engaged, through educational and rehabilitation institutions, in taking care of the many victims of violence, both girls and boys.

Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow. For the children who have fallen victim to armed conflicts and have survived, let us do everything possible to give them back their future by helping them to realize their deepest aspirations and enabling them to fulfil their dreams, whether as doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, parents or some other profession or role that contributes to the common good of every society for the prevention of conflicts and the building of peaceful and sustainable communities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/465) and Special Representative Virginia Gamba for her tireless efforts in taking the children and armed conflict agenda forward. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which we co-sponsored.

Unfortunately, children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflicts around the world. We are deeply troubled by the increase in the number of violations committed against children in 2017. As we speak, millions of children seek to survive under unprecedented challenges arising from conflicts and related displacement. We see the suffering and hopelessness very vividly in the eyes of Syrian, Palestinian, Rohingya and other children. However, despair cannot and should not prevail. If hope is to triumph, we must continue to work hard to provide hope for a better future for the children who suffer under armed conflict.

The crisis in Syria has taken the biggest toll on children. The findings of the Secretary-General's report prove that the conditions of Syrian children are alarming. They are facing violence imposed upon them not only by the regime but also by terrorist groups. The responsibility of the international community in terms of its failure to protect and prevent cannot be overlooked either. In that context, we observe the side effects of empowering terrorist entities. It is therefore worth mentioning one of the important findings of the Secretary-General's report.

During the reporting period, verified cases of the recruitment and the use of children by the terrorist organizations of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ) increased fivefold from 46 to 224, compared to 2016. In fact, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the Democratic Union Party (PYD)and the YPG/YPJ terrorist organizations have a long-standing practice of forcefully recruiting young girls and boys, in violation of international law and norms. Forty per cent of PKK recruits are children younger than 18, while 10 per cent are under the age of 15. Recently, the PKK terrorist organization, under the pretext of fighting Da'esh in Iraq, has forcibly recruited minor Yazidis, transferred them to battlegrounds far from their homeland and mercilessly punished those unyielding to that horrendous attempt.

The PYD and the YPG/YPJ resort to the same tactic in Syria. As a recent case in point, I would like to bring to the Council's attention a press release issued by the World Council of Arameans on 29 May, which drew the attention of the international community to the abduction of as many as 50 young Arameans by the PYD and and the YPG/YPJfor the purpose of forced recruitment.

To protect children from falling into the hands of terrorist organizations, the international community should exercise full solidarity and cooperation in fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It should also be underlined that references to non-State armed groups within the context of the children and armed conflict agenda, including resolution 2427 (2018), which we co-sponsored today, should not be construed in any way to indicate that terrorist organizations are subjects of international humanitarian law. We shall resolutely continue fighting against terrorist organizations, in accordance with applicable international law and our national counter-terrorism legislation.

Meeting the fundamental humanitarian needs of children in conflicts and emergencies, including for the provision of health services, must be one of our priorities. In the meantime, investing in the education of all children, including girls, requires particular attention. Last but not least, it is clear that the best way to keep children from harm's way is to work to prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts in the first place. In that understanding, Turkey will continue to support the Secretary-General's focus on prevention.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Let me first congratulate you, Madam President, and the Swedish delegation on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July.

In the year of the centenary of our former President Nelson Mandela, it is instructive to draw on his wisdom when he remarked,

> "Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation."

Today's debate is extremely relevant and timely, particularly given the rise in the incidence of violations of the rights of children not only in armed conflict but also in terms of emerging asymmetrical threats to global peace and security, such as terrorism. The debate should also be seen within the context of preventative measures and addressing the root causes of conflict. The involvement of children, the most vulnerable group of victims, in armed conflict is tantamount to sowing the seeds of war, which will bear insidious and destructive consequences in later years.

We commend the work of the Secretariat and the briefings by Ms. Gamba, Ms. Fore and Ms. Londoño in bringing to the attention of the Council the grave violations that continue to be perpetuated by State and non-State actors alike. Indeed, it is a most vital responsibility of the Council to respond to those violations and hold those responsible to account.

The fact that those violations have increased is a matter of serious concern, which indicates that our efforts so far have not been completely effective. Nevertheless, the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict is admirable and we applaud the delegation of Sweden, as the Chair of the Working Group, for its continued efforts in moving forward the children and armed conflict agenda. However, we believe that more resources and attention could be assigned to the agenda.

Addressing the root causes of conflict, the effectiveness of long-term peacebuilding and the preventative diplomacy approach hinge strongly on the protection of children from the adverse influences and grave violations committed against them during armed conflicts. It is vital that we not lose sight of the fact that today's children could become future rebel leaders, who would have learned that in order to fend for themselves in an environment of little-to-no legitimate economic opportunities and political marginalization, they would have to take up arms. Instead, we should create a conducive environment where today's children can play a positive role in society.

In that regard, South Africa would like to emphasize the recommendation made in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) that the funding gap for the reintegration of children recruited by armed groups back into normal society be urgently addressed. We fully support the establishment of the multi-year funding mechanism, which will allow for the early release of children into long-term viable alternatives to military life.

South Africa underscores the importance of addressing the present problem of grave violations against children during war times as a critical prerequisite of future sustainable peace. In that regard, South Africa fully supports the strengthening of mechanisms for the protection of children in armed conflict. That could take the form of specific provisions in United Nations peacekeeping missions, as well as the engagement of the United Nations with armed groups on the matter. We also welcome adoption this morning of resolution 2427 (2018), which condemns the attacks and the threats of attacks, in contravention of international law, against schools and health centres. We need to ensure the safety of children in schools and health facilities during conflict. Therefore, we call for the urgent and imperative need to hold accountable all perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses and international humanitarian law violations, irrespective of their status or political affiliation.

To further that aim, South Africa welcomes the Secretary-General's call for cooperation with regional and subregional organizations in coordinating efforts to address violations against children in armed conflict. We would also like to highlight the need for dedicated child protection capacities within regional mechanisms and to encourage further engagement with the United Nations to prioritize the development of tools to forestall grave violations, including through the adoption of prevention plans aimed at institutionalizing preventive measures.

In conclusion, we believe that the Security Council should take firm and concrete action to ensure that our children, and youth in general, are shielded from the horrors of conflict and other violations that threaten to undermine our future prospects for the maintenance of international peace, security and development. That stance should be applied consistently, devoid of double standards, to ensure that children are protected no matter where and in what context they may find themselves.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Ms. Pham (Viet Nam): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. We are honoured to acknowledge the presence of the Prime Minister of Sweden and take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Sweden for moving this agenda forward. We extend our thanks to all of the briefers for their statements.

While welcoming the positive developments in the protection of children in armed conflicts, ASEAN remains deeply concerned over the alarming increase in grave violations against children. Attacks on schools, students and education personnel are alarming as children are put at risk and deprived of their opportunities to learn and grow for a better future. These ongoing shocking realities call for greater consensus and stronger actions by the international community. In that regard, ASEAN would like to highlight the following points.

First, more coordinated and responsive strategies at the national, regional and global levels are urgently needed, ranging from bringing an end to and preventing the use and recruitment of children, as well as ensuring their reintegration and rehabilitation and accountability for perpetrators.

Secondly, ASEAN looks forward to the development of practical guidelines for the integration and inclusion of child protection issues in peace processes. Such guidelines need to fully address the needs of children during and after armed conflicts.

Thirdly, ASEAN emphasizes the importance of constructive engagement among relevant partners, in line with the principle of the primary responsibility and authority of States, including closer coordination between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and concerned States to ensure comprehensive, accurate and objective reporting.

Fourthly, ASEAN encourages those countries that have yet to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so, as proof of their unwavering commitment to child protection issues.

For ASEAN, the protection of children is always high on our agenda. In 2016, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children adopted a work plan with 16 thematic areas, including the elimination of violence against children and the right of children to participate in all affairs that affect them. ASEAN also has been working closely with external partners in that endeavour.

It has been two decades since the first open debate of the Council on this agenda item (see S/PV.3896). Next year will also mark the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1261 (1999) — the first resolution on children and armed conflict. Those outcomes reflect our dedication to this important matter, and we realize that much remains to be done.

ASEAN reiterates its strong commitment and stands ready to work with other external partners to ensure a better future for children all over the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Boukadoum (Algeria): Today's meeting, convened on the initiative of Sweden, should not focus on or end up with a mere renewal of the general commitment to protecting children and armed conflicts. There is no doubt that, at least in principle, this endeavour is shared by all of us. Therefore, our meeting and resolution 2427 (2018), which we adopted this morning, should focus on the most practical and appropriate measures to make sure that this commitment is fulfilled and that the place of children is in school and not in armed conflicts.

Let me say at this juncture that, regardless of the situation, any child who is in an armed conflict is by definition a victim.

Let me address the Council, the Secretary-General and his Special Representative as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict: Be bold in proposing and advancing measures, bearing in mind all the mechanisms, procedures and authority that you hold and make clear the interaction that exists between all areas of intervention that were defined perfectly the concept note before us(S/2018/625, annex).

We recognize the extreme importance of and strongly support the mandate of the Office of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We always wait for her report to be published, which marks a crucial moment at the United Nations. We would like something to be added to that report. We also believe that the United Nations list of terrorist groups in the annexes of the report should be differentiated from other non-State actors or parties to peace processes or peace agreements.

It is rather shocking that, 13 years after the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, there is still a constant increase in violations against children, as is underlined by the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465). The case of the Central African Republic is one terrible example, as the use of children in armed conflict has quadrupled in that country. That is appalling. In all cases, 21,000 violations of children's rights, as documented by the report of the Secretary-General, represent 21,000 challenges to all of us and to the Security Council. This cannot continue.

We would like to see the consolidation of the results of the global Children, Not Soldiers campaign through renewed efforts by Governments and agencies, but we must recognize that those efforts have not reversed the negative trend. Barbaric attacks are still being committed by terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram, Da'esh and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in Western Africa, in particular the kidnapping and selling of girls to terrorist fighters. That is another challenge to us all that calls for greater coordinated efforts, and we should continue to give specific attention to the protection of girls, as they are at greater risk of sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Long-standing peace will never be achieved unless we give children the means, skills and education to rebuild a society and institutions torn apart by armed conflict. Peacekeeping missions have an important role to play in the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. It is therefore essential that peacekeeping missions receive the necessary training and resources to effectively perform that critical task.

In the context of peacekeeping processes, we strongly believe that specific provisions on the protection of children and armed conflict should be included in all peace negotiations and agreements and in peacebuilding. Indeed, for example, the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, signed in Algiers in 2015, contains specific provisions related to the protection of children from armed conflict and the engagement of communities to support the return and maintenance of children, especially girls, in school. Such provisions should inspire all ongoing peace processes.

Let me conclude by saying that the increased number and scope of conflict hasten the importance of cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and regional organizations, especially the African Union, in all areas and precisely on prevention.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Hau Do Suan (Myanmar): Myanmar has made significant progress in its efforts to end and prevent violations and abuses against children since the signing of the joint action plan in June 2012. Since then, more than 877 former underage soldiers have been released and reintegrated into communities. The country task force on monitoring and reporting has verified that cases of new recruitment have dramatically decreased. The Tatmadaw further released 67 children in 2017 and no new recruitments have been reported in 2018.

The Government has also taken various steps to prevent child recruitment and abuse by armed forces. A nationwide public awareness campaign to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Tatmadaw has been in place since 2013. Moreover, army officers and members of the military have received training on the joint action Plan and the prevention of underage recruitment.

The Government of Myanmar has taken important steps to sign or ratify international legal instruments to protect children. In particular, the 1993 National Child Law has been revised in conformity with prevailing international norms and is soon to be adopted by Parliament. The new Law has devoted a whole chapter solely to children and armed conflict. Furthermore, Myanmar has signed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups in February 2017. Myanmar is now in the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

With regard to accountability, a total of 67 military officers and 191 other ranks have so far been prosecuted for violating recruitment procedures. No human rights violations will be tolerated. For the alleged violations mentioned in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2018/465), I would like to reiterate that legal action will be taken where there is clear evidence. The Government recently announced its decision to form an independent commission of inquiry with an international member. The commission will investigate all human rights violations following the August 2017 Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army terrorist attacks of 30 security outposts.

Myanmar has been working closely with the country task force on monitoring and reporting. In May, the Government invited Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba to Myanmar. I would like to express our sincere appreciation to Ms. Gamba for her spirit of constructive engagement and cooperation. We are now working closely with her Office for the early completion of the implementation of the joint action plan. In that regard, I wish to inform the Council that with a view to raising greater awareness and to accelerating the implementation of the joint action plan, the Government of Myanmar has invited the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to conduct a training workshop for security personnel in Myanmar on the six grave violations.

Myanmar believes that sustainable peace is the only way to alleviate the plight of children in armed conflicts. Peace is essential to sustainable development and lasting democracy and human rights. Bearing that in mind, the Government held the 21st-Century Panglong Union Peace Conference in pursuit of a lasting peace and a democratic federal union. The Government is also prioritizing the inclusion of child protection issues in the discussion of the forthcoming session of the Peace Conference.

Myanmar remains committed to the protection and promotion of the rights of children. We will work hand in hand with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and other international partners to end violations against children and build a better future for them.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shilo (Israel): Over 20 years ago, the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306) was published, paving the way for the Security Council to establish the children and armed conflict agenda. Despite more than 20 years of countless resolutions and debate, hundreds of millions of children still endure war and strife, physical injuries and mental trauma.

It is difficult to find words to describe the scale of the atrocities we have seen in the past few years. Acts of sustained barbarism and cruelty have shaken our collective conscience. We must, however, not let despair overcome our duty to protect these innocent souls. We must provide the victims with the tools to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society. These children deserve our honest efforts.

The Middle East region is plagued by this horrific reality. According to UNICEF, 2017 was the worst year yet for Syria's children as violence ripped apart places that should be safe — schools, hospitals, playgrounds and even the homes of children. It is reported that in the first two months of 2018 alone, more than 1,000 children were killed or injured. Syria is the world's biggest producer of both internally displaced people and refugees. Current estimates show that 2.8 million children have been displaced from their homes.

In Yemen, according to the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465), over 500 children have been killed in air strikes and ground assaults. More than 700 have been maimed. These acts of cruelty reflect a complete and utter disrespect for life.

For decades, Palestinian children have been exploited by their leadership. They attend schools named after terrorists. They cross streets honouring terrorists. They watch their leaders on television hand out candy to celebrate terrorists who have killed innocent Israelis. We acknowledge the fact that, for the first time, the Secretary-General's report recognizes Palestinian leaders' incitement to violence. But it does not end with incitement. In Gaza, Hamas — the internationally recognized terrorist organization — has long been guilty of using children for terrorism. It exploits schools, hospitals and civilian neighbourhoods as bases for its terror activities and does not hesitate to employ the despicable practice of using innocent people, including children, as human shields.

This summer, while children around the world are enjoying their vacation at home, at summer camps or on the beach, the children of Gaza are instead attending military camps. Hamas recruits thousands of children to those camps. Instead of teaching them how to swim or play soccer, the children of Gaza are taught how to assemble automatic weapons and operate missiles. Just in the past month, Hamas has even resorted to turning children's toys into weapons, sending bombs made out of kites into Israel. The incendiary kites ignited over 400 fires in Israel, destroying more than 7,000 acres of Israeli agricultural land. To make matters worse, over the past month Hamas has launched hundreds of rockets and mortar shells into Israeli civilian population centres, even hitting a kindergarten in one of its attacks. That behaviour cannot be misconstrued — Hamas is targeting children.

While we recognize the progress made, the report, unfortunately, continues to describe only a fraction of the reality on the ground and misleads the international community. One reason for that misleading portrayal of reality is the fact that the formal field working group includes organizations like Defense for Children International-Palestine, which is closely linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). We have raised that concern repeatedly. We must recall that PFLP is an internationally recognized terrorist organization infamous for turning airplane hijacking into a preferred tool of terror. No non-governmental organization with ties to terrorist organizations can be a source of information for an objective, credible United Nations working group.

Israel envisions a future that does not require a meeting on children and armed conflict. We believe in solutions, and with the honest efforts of all Member States and international bodies, we are sure those solutions are within our reach. We must protect our children today so that we can prevent future conflict. We can do this in two ways. First, we must invest in our youth and empower them to become actors for peace and conflict prevention. Secondly, for those who have been affected by conflict and the trauma of war, it is our moral duty to provide them with education and health care, including psychosocial support and rehabilitation.

Through such efforts, we can break the cycle of conflict and ensure a peaceful life for these children, their communities and their countries.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Ms. Krisnamurthi (Indonesia): Indonesia would like to welcome and thank Mr. Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of Sweden, for presiding over today's open debate. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/465), as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, the Executive Director for UNICEF and Ms. Londoño for their briefings

Indonesia aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Promoting and protecting children's rights to ensure their well-being is a moral obligation that all countries must fulfil. While every achievement is good news, the persistence and scope of the violence against children in armed conflict, particularly in relation to recruitment, killing and maiming, cannot be ignored. Every violation, including those committed by armed groups, such as acts of terror, mass kidnapping and all sexual abuse and exploitation, must be condemned in the strongest language possible.

Indonesia believes that given the changing and complex nature of current conflicts, the international community must intensify its efforts. As a country that considers this issue as a core one, Indonesia has become a pathfinder country in the global effort to protect children from violence and exploitation. It has also become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We continue to support the promotion and protection of the rights of children agenda to achieve a sustainable future for all.

Concerning the way forward, allow me to share some pertinent points.

First, it is the central responsibility of Member States to protect children. No country should spare any effort in promoting the rights of children and ensuring their growth and development. On the other hand, building the capacity of Member States in the area of child protection is also a key component that requires international cooperation.

Secondly, children will remain vulnerable to exploitation unless the root causes of conflict are addressed. Investing in development and meeting social and economic needs are important factors in bringing stability and progress to societies. More importantly, there is an urgent need to maximize efforts to prevent the recruitment, radicalization and widespread dissemination of terrorist ideology among children and young people.

Thirdly, the full protection of and respect for the best interests of children should be paramount in counter-terrorism efforts and in peace and ceasefire agreements, including their treatment as primary victims and not as perpetrators when associated with non-State armed groups. During their reintegration, the aim should be to create the basis for a transformative and durable change in society, leading to long-term sustainable peace and stability. This implies the provision of a protective environment, access to quality education and provisions for specific physical and mental health needs.

Fourthly, we encourage all Member States to universally ratify and implement the relevant international treaties and to enact related national legislation.

Lastly, Indonesia is committed to ending violence against civilians in armed conflict, particularly women and children. We would like to encourage the sharing of best practices among the United Nations peacekeeping forces to strengthen the role of peacekeeping missions in the protection of children. Indonesia would also welcome the inclusion of personnel specifically dedicated to child protection in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Cho Tae-yul (Republic of Korea): Madam President, let me at the outset join previous speakers in commending your initiative to convene today's meeting. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465), which helps to make clear the full gravity of this important issue, and to welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which enjoys broad support with sponsors from 95 countries, including the Republic of Korea.

Over the past 20-some years, we have collectively endeavoured to advance the protection of children from armed conflict and have achieved some progress towards this end. However, there remains a significant gap between our aspirations and the harsh realities on the ground. Children are increasingly and disproportionately affected by the myriad ongoing and protracted armed conflicts around the world.

It is appalling that in 2017 alone more than 21,000 verified violations were committed against children globally, a substantial increase indeed from 16,500 in the previous year. It is also deeply troubling that children under the age of 18 make up more than half of the world's 25.4 million refugees.

Against this distressing backdrop, I would like to highlight three points of particular importance in addressing this daunting challenge.

First, we must continue to focus on prevention. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly emphasized, prevention is the paradigm-shifting approach that closes the gap between commitment and reality. It is also the direction underscored by the three reviews on peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture, and women and peace and security.

While serving as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission last year, I worked closely with the Secretary-General to help push his prevention agenda forward. The Republic of Korea remains firmly committed to supporting him in translating this commitment into reality, especially bearing in mind the urgent need to protect children from the danger of armed conflicts. Such efforts should start with preventing children from being exposed to violent extremism. It is for this reason that, working together with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and leading information and communications technology companies such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Twitter, we launched last year the Knowledge-Sharing Platform, which is aimed at strengthening the capabilities of small technology companies to fight against terrorists' attempts to abuse digital spaces, thereby enhancing young people's awareness of the terrorist use of the Internet.

Secondly, we must ensure accountability for all violations against children. Strengthening accountability and abolishing impunity is the key to ending gross violations and preventing any recurrence thereof. Those who have committed grave violations against children must be held accountable through both national and international justice systems, including the International Criminal Court.

In addition to justice mechanisms, we also need to make full use of other tools, including, among others, the monitoring and reporting mechanisms established by the Security Council, the listing of violators in the Secretary-General's report, and targeted sanctions to seek accountability.

Thirdly, children should be seen as enablers for peacebuilding and sustaining peace. As the Secretary-General highlighted in his report, we must ensure that child protection is an integral part of strategies for enabling sustainable peace and that the close involvement of children is promoted throughout the whole process.

In this regard, it is critically important to strengthen partnerships with all stakeholders, including regional and subregional organizations, international financial institutions and civil society, in the light of existing funding gaps and cross-border violations. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General also has an important role to play, especially in harnessing and leveraging resources from various actors.

In working towards that end, special attention should be paid to reintegrating former child soldiers and children of foreign terrorist fighters into society without stigmatization. It is against this backdrop that the Republic of Korea currently provides assistance to Colombia in its post-conflict recovery through the Korea-Colombia Friendship Rehabilitation Center, established to help former combatants, including young soldiers, to be reintegrated into Colombian society with enhanced attention to their psychological security, physical rehabilitation and professional skills.

The Republic of Korea will continue to work closely with the international community to save and protect children from the scourge of armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Eiermann (Liechtenstein): Children are among the most vulnerable individuals in need of protection from the effects of armed conflict. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) highlights the large increase in the number of violations compared with previous reporting cycles. Thus we continue to often fail to provide protection when it is most needed. We reiterate our strong support for the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and for her continuous efforts to shed more light on such violations. Protecting the independence and integrity of her mandate is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility.

There are numerous initiatives that enable us to enhance protection. The Safe Schools Declaration, supported by 76 States, including Liechtenstein, is an important commitment to continuing education during armed conflict, including by protecting schools and universities from military use. The full implementation of Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) will also go a long way towards improving the situation of children in armed conflict by ensuring the protection of those providing medical services as well as health-care facilities. Both initiatives are aimed at counteracting the worrisome trend of increasing disregard for international humanitarian law. The Council should follow up on these initiatives and help enforce compliance by State and non-State actors with the Geneva Conventions.

We welcome the fact that the list of parties that have committed grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict has been updated recently. Evidence-based and impartial listing is a key tool to put pressure on State and non-State actors alike to take concrete measures to better ensure the protection of children. Myanmar's State and border forces were added to the list for the first time following the widespread and systematic violence committed against the Rohingya in Rakhine state, the destruction of their villages and their forced deportation into Bangladesh.

We share the Secretary-General's deep concerns about the violations committed against children, such as killing, maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as outlined in his recent report.

We were also appalled to hear from the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict about her recent trip to Myanmar and Bangladesh (see S/PV.8133) and her account of atrocious sexual and gender-based violence committed in a systematic manner against children, even babies. We will continue to support Bangladesh's efforts to host the large refugee population, but we are also concerned about the reports of forced disappearances of women and minors in the camps and incidents of human trafficking. Unfortunately, the Council has remained silent on those challenges, even after its own visit to the region. Accountability for the crimes committed cannot be treated as an afterthought when it is clearly a precondition for the stated objective of enabling the Rohingya refugees to return. We have repeatedly echoed those who have expressed the view that the Council should engage in a serious discussion with a view to referring the situation to the International Criminal Court, a decision that would be in line with the code of conduct on mass atrocities of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, supported by 117 States.

Sexual violence against children is one of the violations most chronically underreported during situations of armed conflict. United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanisms often fail to capture many such incidents, particularly those committed against men and boys, as has been shown in the research done by the All Survivors Project in places such as Syria and the Central African Republic. We encourage all the relevant United Nations entities to conduct more effective monitoring, documenting, investigating and reporting of violations against children, including rape and other forms of sexual violence. Peacekeeping and special political missions, as well as fact-finding commissions and commissions of inquiry, should be mandated accordingly and given sufficient capacities and resources to implement those mandates. At the same time, the United Nations should make better use of initiatives such as the Justice Rapid Response roster in order to enable experts to be deployed as quickly as possible.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We thank the Swedish presidency for organizing today's open debate. Bangladesh welcomes the Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018). The briefers shared grim realities about the fact that children's rights, including their right to protection, are being trampled and ignored in many parts of the world. They also highlighted some positive achievements in the area of protection, particularly in protecting children from recruitment as combatants. Such gains make a sobering yet compelling case for sustaining our efforts with renewed determination.

The Security Council recently witnessed issues related to the protection of children in their most pressing manifestations in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Children constitute 58 per cent of the more than 700,000 Rohingya who have entered our territory from Myanmar's Rakhine state since August 2017. So far, 36,373 of them have been found to be orphans, with 7,771 having lost both parents. Without parental care, they remain particularly vulnerable to trafficking, sexual exploitation and other forms of criminal activity. On average, 60 babies are being born in the camps every day. Some of them are born to mothers who were subjected to sexual violence in what now appears to have been its premeditated use as a weapon of war. We made a point of addressing the status of such children in the bilateral arrangement we concluded with Myanmar on facilitating the voluntary, safe and dignified return of forcibly displaced Rohingya to Rakhine state.

It may be an illusion to assume that violence against the Rohingya and their children has subsided. Ms. Yanghee Lee, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, talked to some recently arrived Rohingya in Cox's Bazar. This is part of what she told the press:

> "I was horrified to be told by one woman that her 12-year-old son had been chopped to pieces when he visited the family's fish hatchery, after the family had been told by security forces that they could not go there unless they accepted the National Verification Card. Such brutality, and to a child, is deplorable."

What concerns us most is that such accounts hardly attest to a stable situation on the ground and could only be a further deterrent to the Rohingya in their prospects for a voluntary return. There have been reports that non-State actors in Rakhine state were also involved in violence inflicted on children. It will be critical to ensure that the crimes committed against these child victims are accounted for and their perpetrators brought to justice, in order to help the children reconcile with such harrowing memories. Meanwhile, along with our humanitarian partners, we are in a race against time to give these hundreds of thousands of Rohingya children the protection and assistance they need, including mass immunization, nutritional supplements, non-formal education, skill development, psychosocial support and recreational facilities. Their vulnerability to natural disasters, child marriage, forced labour, violent extremism and other forms of exploitation remains a major area of concern. Without a durable solution to their situation, their vulnerabilities will most likely exact a price on the future peace and security of the region and beyond.

There is no way that the Council and the international community should allow Myanmar to avoid its responsibility for creating a favourable, sustainable and credible situation for ensuring protection for these children and their rights, starting with their right to return home. We urge the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to make concrete recommendations for the Council's consideration in that regard in her updated report focusing on the situation in Myanmar.

The image of our Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, consoling a distraught Rohingya child with a ghastly wound across his face has become iconic, but we expect the Myanmar leadership to help make such images things of the past.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malta.

Mr. Inguanez (Malta): First and foremost, I would like to join others in thanking the Swedish presidency of the Council for organizing today's open debate and placing a spotlight on this issue. The protection of children must remain one of our top priorities if we want to have lasting peace and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. I also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Yenny Londoño for sharing their insights today. We particularly welcome the Special Representative's persistent efforts and invaluable work in this field.

Malta aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

This year's report by the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465) confirms that children continue to be disproportionately affected by such conflict. It is disheartening and shameful that in this day and age, children in various parts of the world continue to suffer the consequences of armed conflict. We cannot realistically expect a peaceful tomorrow if schools are being bombed today. It is completely unacceptable that in certain parts of the world, children have to deal with abductions, rape, sexual violence and killings as if they were a normal part of daily life.

Action at the international level is crucial if we are to ensure that children get the future they truly deserve.

regardless of the country or region they happen to be born in. In doing so, due attention must also be given to all who have already suffered grave violations. Those victims must not be forgotten, and we have a responsibility to offer them all the help they need to cope with their traumatic experience and become agents of change. Ms. Londoño's experience is testament to that.

Malta remains particularly concerned about the alarming scale and severity of the effects of violence on children in war zones and their increasing exposure to it. Violence breeds violence. It is deplorable that hospitals and schools are bombed to destruction and that the life-saving work of humanitarian aid workers is impeded. International humanitarian law must be respected by all the parties to a conflict at all times. Furthermore, places where the State is fragile or absent can easily become breeding grounds for terrorist groups who abuse and exploit children. Here too we must strive to ensure that children do not grow up in an environment where the only opportunities are offered by a military life and a war economy. Synergies are needed so that Member States and regional and subregional organizations can work in partnership and complement United Nations efforts. We must continue investing in peace in order to ensure that children can grow up in an environment that allows them to reach their full potential.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Galbavy (Slovakia): My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Slovakia condemns in strongest terms the recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict. Military exploitation of children is not only completely wrong and unjustifiablem, it is also illegal. Children simply have no role in warfare. We call for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and encourage those States that have not yet signed or ratified the Protocol to do so without delay.

I would like to express our appreciation for Sweden's leadership in negotiating an important resolution on children and armed conflict, adopted today, which my country has readily co-sponsored. Resolution 2427 (2018) builds upon commitments from last year and stresses that the protection of children should be part of a comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and sustain peace. We are optimistic that there is increasing awareness about the fact that the protection of children must be better connected to conflict prevention and sustaining peace efforts. Ultimately, our goal must be to prevent armed conflicts from happening in the first place.

Despite progress in protecting children in armed conflict, the general situation remains grave and unacceptable. According to the 2018 annual report of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict (S/2018/465), there was a 27 per cent increase in the number of grave violations of children's rights verified by the United Nations last year as compared to 2016. We are deeply concerned in particular about reported cases of the denial of humanitarian access as a weapon of war and about the increase in the number of attacks on schools and hospitals.

We appreciate the tireless efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Gamba, who has a key role to play in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The effective implementation of her mandate requires our support and cooperation. Furthermore, I should like to reiterate the crucial importance of child protection advisers in mainstreaming child protection and in monitoring, reporting and prevention efforts in peace operations. Child protection must remain at the heart of United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding and receive adequate support. Where necessary, the number of child protection advisers should be increased in field operations.

As mentioned, last year more than 10,000 children were released as a result of the implementation of action plans signed with armed forces. The recent open Arria Formula meeting in May highlighted the importance of action plans in the Council's framework for ending and preventing grave violations against children. The meeting also highlighted key challenges and priorities for action plans in the coming years that should be taken into consideration, both at Headquarters and in the field.

Lastly, I wish to stress that failing to incorporate the security sector in the solution to the recruitment and use of children can lead to renewed conflict and the use of child soldiery. Resolution 2151 (2014) encourages nations emerging from conflict to take appropriate measures to protect children and ensure that security sector actors are equipped to do so.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Srivihok (Thailand): Let me join others in expressing my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his most recent report (S/2018/465), to Sweden for holding today's open debate, to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her dedication and efforts and to the briefers for their insightful perspectives.

I would also like to align myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Children are key to our future. They are the catalysts for peace, development, prosperity and progress and must be protected so that their potential to engage and contribute to an inclusive and just society can be ensured. Our efforts to address grave violations against children in and after conflict must therefore be a vital component of the prevention agenda. In addressing the issue as part of that agenda, we must take a comprehensive and rights-based approach and continue to raise awareness and promote capacity-building and technical cooperation.

With regard to recruitment, it is essential that civil society, the media, academia and Governments work together to address the evolving tactics used to recruit children, including through online and social media platforms. In addition to law enforcement, strong advocacy and education at the family and community levels can provide the best defence for children falling prey to recruitment.

The peacekeeping community must also ensure that building capacity on child protection becomes a key component of training peacekeepers. We are pleased to inform the Security Council that the Royal Thai Armed Forces and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict recently held a workshop on child protection for Thai peacekeepers preparing for deployment to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. We can do more and explore how regional and subregional organizations can be involved.

Thailand welcomes the release of more than 10,000 children from armed groups in 2017 and sees the reintegration of recently released children as a vital process. Reintegration should be incorporated in relevant national plans and efforts to provide inclusive basic social services, as it is a long-term sustainable solution to prevention and protection.

The annual report of the Secretary-General plays an important role in guiding Member States in strengthening child protection. For that reason, we welcome the enhanced engagement between Member States and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in preparing the report. We also welcome possible further regional engagement on the issue.

The international community must continue its work in all possible ways to put an end to the suffering of children in conflict. Thailand endeavours to do its part and looks forward to working with others to amplify our efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Ms. García Gutiérrez (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Madam President, for convening today's important debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and with the statement made by the representative of Argentina on behalf of countries that signed the Safe Schools Declaration.

We would like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, for their briefings. We also thank Ms. Yenny Londoño for her statement. We reiterate our support and appreciation to Ms. Gamba for her arduous efforts.

Costa Rica has carefully read and studied the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) and shares the view that all parties to armed conflict have a special obligation to protect children and that that obligation flows directly from international law. However, regrettably, millions of children suffer as a result of armed conflict and asymmetrical attacks perpetrated by non-State armed groups, which have a severe impact on children in densely populated areas in particular, especially since such attacks are carried out in schools or hospitals. Given their primary responsibility for the protection of children, States must strengthen their national capacities to protect them and keep them away from armed conflict, violent extremism and recruitment by non-State armed groups.

It is imperative to conduct coordinated international efforts for prevention and early warning, as it is the most effective way to fulfil their obligations and ensure that the protection of children is an integral and comprehensive part of any prevention strategy. We recognize the urgency of ensuring that the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and of international humanitarian law are not dead letter. Using children as soldiers is unacceptable. It is also acceptable for the parties to conflict to cut off the supply of drinking water, electricity, gas, food, medicine or humanitarian aid for civilians, which makes them increasingly vulnerable. States must adopt measures to protect and ensure that schools are safe and welcoming. In 2015, Costa Rica was one of the 38 countries that signed the Safe Schools Declaration, which was adopted in Oslo, and we encourage those who have not signed it to do so.

The Organization, and in particular the Council, must implement a uniform and consolidated monitoring strategy. It should provide information about, and respond more effectively to, the serious violations of children's rights, including by granting the relevant mandates to peacekeeping operations and to the political missions that ensure their capacity.

We reiterate our condemnation of the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, especially in the context of peacekeeping missions, and call for the necessary steps to be taken to bring those responsible to justice. Costa Rica calls for ensuring access to child-protection services in all detention centres and ending impunity for those who commit these grave violations.

Finally, my country strongly calls for children who have been recruited by non-State armed forces to be considered victims, that they be placed in detention centres only as a last resort and that their protection and rights be guaranteed, including the right to psychological and educational support after demobilization, so as to ensure their reintegration into society and the sustainability of peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al-Otoom (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Swedish presidency for its efforts at the helm of the Security Council this month. We wish your delegation, Madam President, every success. I also wish to thank the briefers for their valuable briefings.

Despite the world's major progress in developing legal norms and frameworks for the protection of children in armed conflict, and despite improvements in the way the international community addresses the protection of children during and after armed conflict, we are nevertheless seeing an unprecedented increase in violations, attacks and violence directed against children as well as an expansion in their numbers as victims in the world. This situation has been compounded by an increase in attacks on hospitals and schools in numerous conflict areas.

While the nature of armed conflict is changing, the major challenges before the international community are the following. How do we ensure that non-State armed groups respect international humanitarian law and human rights? How do we ensure accountability for those committing these grave violations and crimes against children in armed conflicts? How do we make sure that they do not enjoy impunity for those violations? In this context, it is necessary to draw attention to the need to ensure that peacekeeping operations have all the capabilities to protect children and save them from being exploited.

We wish to highlight the ongoing violations being committed against Palestinian children in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as the Israeli occupying forces do not hesitate to violate the human rights of children. Every day, these children face numerous threats such as arrest, imprisonment, torture and death, not to mention the aggressions of the Israeli occupying forces and settlers without impunity.

We underscore the importance of giving attention to the situation of children living in others conflict zones like Syria, Yemen, Libya and Myanmar, in order to provide them with protection. We must also give due attention to providing them with the rehabilitation, reinsertion and reintegration programmes. We must not forget to give appropriate attention to the rights of the girl victims of trafficking, rape, sexual violence and worse kinds of exploitation, as we have seen in the atrocities committed by Da'esh against Yazidi women in Iraq.

Education remains the best way to protect the future of displaced children. That is why Jordan has made and continues to make tireless efforts to provide Syrian refugee children with the best possible education services, given the means at our disposal. We have also established a child-protection centre for refugees and another centre related to promoting educational environment and child protection. Ongoing financial support for the host countries by the international community is of course required in order to continue providing education and health services until a political solution is reached and the refugees return home.

Jordan insists that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees remain free from politicization and manipulation, and calls on the international community to continue supporting that vital entity, because any shortage in its funding will lead to the closure of schools and the suffering of tens of thousands of children who will not be able to continue their education and their life as required. Jordan also supports at all levels the historic resolution 2250 (2015), on youth, security and peace.

In conclusion, the eyes of millions of children around the world are turned to you, Madam President, and to the rest of the Security Council members and the United Nations Member States for a better future. We must promise that we will not deny them education, growth opportunities and living in peace. Children are our most important investment in a better future and in achieving peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like at the outset to thank the Permanent Mission of Sweden for convening today's important meeting on the theme "Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow". I also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their outstanding briefings. We also thank Ms. Londoño for her briefing, in which she shared her own personal experience.

At the beginning of my statement, I would like to share our immense pride and joy at seeing the successful collaboration between the Sudan and the United Nations result in a joint action plan to put an end to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. This plan has allowed the Sudan to be removed from the Secretary-General's list of countries where children's rights are violated and where children are being used in armed conflict. This success would not have been possible without the remarkable cooperation and tireless work of the Government of the Sudan, Ms. Gamba's Office, in particular her direct supervision of the implementation of the plan, and UNICEF.

During the period of implementing this plan, in November 2017 my country received a delegation from the Security Council, headed by the Permanent Representative of Sweden, Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and comprising other members of the Security Council as well as representatives of the Office the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to witness that experience. The delegation was also able to observe the progress made in the implementation of the plan on protection of children in armed conflict.

Alongside the Sudan's efforts in the area of child protection, which we cannot outline in detail here owing to time constraints, I would like to note that late this year the Government of the Sudan and the Office of the Special Representative, together with African regional organizations, intend to launch a regional campaign based on the initiative Ms. Gamba outlined during her latest visit to the Sudan. The Government of the Sudan has also established mechanisms at the local level for reporting cases of child-soldier recruitment and grave violations against them. We respond to these reports through competent mechanisms such as the National Council for Children, the police, the courts and even specialized tribunals for Darfur. The Government of the Sudan has also expressed its willingness to make progress in future cooperation with the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. A meeting was held in Khartoum with countries members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to discuss issues related to child protection.

We will work in the near future to strengthen cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies, as well as with international partners, so that Sudan can be the first country to convert a successful action plan with the United Nations into a long-term national action plan to prevent all serious violations against children. We hope that other parties will be inspired by our initiative and follow in the Sudan's footsteps.

Mr. Yaakob (Malaysia): Let me begin by congratulating Sweden on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of

July and for organizing this open debate. Malaysia also thanks this morning's briefers.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Malaysia thanks the Secretary-General for his annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462), dated 14 May, and supports the mandate carried out by the Security Council, which includes the integrity and impartiality of the mechanism for listing all perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights. The report highlights the consequential impact of when children are denied humanitarian access, including the use of starvation as a method of warfare.

Malaysia encourages the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to develop practical guidelines on data collection regarding the denial of humanitarian access. We hope that such an effort would help to standardize and support the work of United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting.

Malaysia shares the view of many delegations that spoke this morning on the dangers, risks and violations that children fall prey to in armed conflict, including abduction, when children, as we all know, should be in school. Therefore, in our view, today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) is important, as it underscores our unified stance on protecting children and condemning abduction. In addition, strengthening monitoring and reporting abductions, as well as identifying the perpetrators, will contribute to ensuring accountability.

At the same time, we must also ensure that security forces and peacekeeping missions are competent and proactively respond to situations in which children are exposed to the risk of abduction and other grave violations. We must also recognize that reintegration is a long-term effort that requires the shared responsibility of all stakeholders, including regional organizations. In that regard, we call on Member States, United Nations entities and other parties concerned to integrate child protection provisions in community-based reintegration programmes that foster a spirit of unity and reconciliation among communities ravaged by war.

We are equally shocked by the increasing number of attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as the military use of schools by State and non-State armed groups alike, thereby subsequently depriving access to education and health care to thousands of children. Therefore, my delegation encourages all Member States to consider endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, which aims, among other goals, to raise awareness of good practices that would deter from the military use of educational facilities in armed conflict and maintain schools as mainstays of learning, not bloodshed. My delegation also urges Member States to implement the recommendations of the Secretary-General on measures to protect health care contained in resolution 2286 (2016), which Malaysia supported and co-sponsored. The resolution aims to enhance the practical implementation of protections afforded under international law to prevent acts of violence against the wounded and sick and medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities, and to better ensure accountability for such acts.

The issue of accountability must be pursued, as it is a vital component of a comprehensive approach to child protection. My delegation urges that firm action be taken under national or international justice mechanisms, where appropriate, against parties that commit violations and abuses against children. We reiterate the importance of the Security Council framework on children and armed conflict and the various tools that have been developed to ensure the accountability and compliance of parties to conflict, including through the listing mechanism of the annual report. We believe that facts should be the determining factor that guide our actions under the framework.

In conclusion, we fervently hope that the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) will serve to further strengthen our collective resolve to continue developing effective strategies and responses for the protection of children in armed conflict, even in the face of unprecedented challenges. Furthermore, we urgently call for the immediate, safe and unconditional release of abducted childrenm and their family reunification, reintegration and rehabilitation. Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to working together with other Member States to ensure that children around the world affected by armed conflict receive the greatest consideration and attention, which they truly deserve.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Privitelli (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): We thank Sweden for making this important topic a priority issue during its presidency. Switzerland welcomes the annual report (S/2018/465) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, which lists more than 21,000 grave violations — an extremely alarming increase of 35 per cent compared to 2016. In the face of such an increase, the international community must act in several areas.

First, protecting children and defending their rights before, during and after conflicts and a comprehensive approach towards sustaining peace are mutually reinforcing. Protecting those who are most vulnerable preserves our countries' resources for the future, thereby entailing long-term consequences involving governance and peacebuilding. Switzerland therefore supports the multi-stakeholder partnership End Violence Against Children. The goal of that initiative is to strengthen political will and accelerate relevant efforts so that every child can grow up shielded from violence. The initiative is supported by 271 member organizations. At the same time, the Sustainable Development Goals provide a long-term vision for protecting children and prevent conflicts.

Secondly, the reintegration and rehabilitation of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups are key factors in preventing the recurrence of conflicts. Armed conflicts inflict physical and extreme emotional suffering upon children. If we want to break the cycle of violence, we must address their long-term integration needs by providing them with education, psychosocial support and the means to ensure their livelihood. The link between the reintegration of children and sustainable peace will be one of the priority themes to be discussed during Geneva Peace Week in November.

Thirdly, the impartial Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism established pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005) and the accurate and credible listing of perpetrators are powerful tools, which can establish responsibility and contribute to preventing grave violations. It is essential that that listing remain impartial and evidence-based. In that regard, we ask the Secretary-General to inform us of measures taken and progress made by listed parties.

In conclusion, Switzerland reiterates its full support for the mandate and work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her Office.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Armed conflict takes a devastating toll on children. The physical and psychological wounds of war, including the resulting displacement and disrupted education, illustrate why we must act. Australia commends the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms Virginia Gamba. The recent work of her Office to strengthen local child protection systems and advocate for the effective reintegration of children deserves high praise. We also applaud the Special Representative's concerted efforts to engage with non-State armed groups and to commit those groups to action plans. That is critical because — as the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465) demonstrates — those groups are responsible for the majority of violations against children. Within peacekeeping missions and United Nations country teams, child protection specialists are key to identifying grave violations and taking preventive action. Together, those efforts reduce the risk of intergenerational harm.

The Secretary-General's report highlights some positive developments, such as the release of children in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Nevertheless, the overall trend of increasing grave violations against children should alarm us all. Unlawful attacks on schools and hospitals, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and Syria, have had particularly grievous impacts on children. Impeding the delivery of humanitarian assistance, instances of which are highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, is having an inordinate and unacceptable impact on children.

We welcome efforts to ensure a longer-term approach is taken to the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. When designing reintegration programmes, the needs of girls must be taken into account, including to prevent the re-recruitment of former child soldiers. There is strong evidence that gender-sensitive programming delivers better outcomes for girls, women and their communities.

Opportunities must also be taken to support the participation of youth in peacebuilding and peace processes. By increasing their participation, we contribute to the protection of their rights as well as setting a strong foundation for an inclusive, sustainable peace. It is critical — for this and for future generations — that we redouble our efforts to protect children and prevent grave violations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Andorra.

Mrs. Vives Balmaña (Andorra) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to thank the Swedish presidency and its Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Löfven, for convening this open debate to express our positions. We have also had the honour of co-sponsoring resolution 2427 (2018), unanimously adopted by the Security Council today.

I also appreciate the enlightening briefings delivered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and the Executive Director of the UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, as well as thank Ms. Yenny Londoño, civil society representative, for her analysis and courageous and forward-looking proposals.

I would like to underscore aspects that are particularly significant, in our opinion. As Yenny Londoño said, listening to the words of child victims and young people and incorporating their experiences is one of the keys to the resolution. They must be given a voice, as set forth by the Convention on the Rights of the Child — a very powerful instrument today, the monitoring of which creates a very solid basis for prevention.

The resolution also incorporates the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The transformation of the world must end the root causes that can lead to conflicts, inequalities, poverty and marginalization, which in some ways can become the framework for violating children's rights. We also value the focus on the reintegration of children, the identification of the challenges of their stigmatization, the need for attention to their physical and mental health and their social integration. No one should be left behind. Each and every child matters — they have their lives, rights, relationships, identities and communities.

In Sustainable Development Goal 4, as has been reiterated in the reports of the Secretary-General and in the resolutions and presidential statements of the Security Council and now, as has been recalled in this meeting, education plays an essential role in conflict prevention. It can facilitate the reintegration of children by adapting to each situation to provide them with the necessary training for their social insertion. It can also equip them with the appropriate skills and values, as well as pay close attention to the specific needs of girls and young women. The values of coexistence and knowledge can create resilient societies with the resources to prevent armed conflict.

Through the collaboration and coordination of United Nations agencies with local entities on the ground and the elaboration of action plans, it has been possible to achieve progress with States and non-State armed groups, such as the most recent cases in Mali, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, the participation in Colombia and what we just heard about in the Sudan.

However, 2017 saw an upsurge in very serious attacks on children that should not be tolerated. The verification of violations of children's rights must therefore continue. My delegation is committed to supporting children enjoying their present and trusting in the future. For that reason, in addition to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Andorra has acceded to the Paris Principles and the Vancouver principles. We urge those who have not yet done so to join those declarations.

We are part of the Group of Friends of Children in Armed Conflict, and we welcome and endorse the statement delivered by the representative of Canada. We have also signed the Declaration on Safe Schools and align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Argentina. The universality of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to which Andorra is a party, would provide greater capacity to combat impunity, since it considers intentional attacks on educational establishments as war crimes. Since 2006, Andorra has also provided an annual contribution of funds to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Allow me to conclude by commending the commitment made by offices, agencies, States and organizations. We reiterate our support for the results to be tangible and thereby- contribute to the consolidation of lasting peace, with children as genuine agents and protagonists of the transformation of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Duarte Lopes (Portugal): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate.

I would also like to thank today's briefers for their statements, in particular Special Representative Virginia Gamba. Portugal reiterates its support for her important mandate, and we commend her unrelenting efforts.

The information contained in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) is alarming. While there have been improvements in some places, with the adoption of action plans, in others violations of children's rights significantly increased, including sexual violence, maiming and killings as a result of military operations, both by State and non-State actors.

Despite the strong normative framework and a mechanism to monitor, report and respond to grave violations against children, huge challenges remain, in particular to the changing nature of hostilities, protracted conflicts, violent extremism and the proliferation of non-State armed groups, including terrorist groups. Prevention, reintegration, rehabilitation and cooperation, both at the domestic and international levels, are essential. Efforts should include the demobilization and return of displaced and refugee children.

As the international community, we must ensure that adequate resources are devoted to child rehabilitation programmes and educational training in post-conflict situations. However, it is fundamental that children deprived of their liberty for their alleged association with extremist groups be recognized, in the first instance, as victims of forcible recruitment who have been exposed to extreme brutality.

Portugal supports the inclusion of child protection provisions in the mandates of peace operations and mandatory predeployment training on child protection for all United Nations troop and police contingents. We also support the effective screening of peacekeepers.

Attacks on, and the use of, schools and hospitals for military purposes cannot continue to take place with impunity. In that context, my country reiterates its active engagement in providing access to education in emergency situations, including higher education, and calls on Governments to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. Education is both a mechanism to prevent recruitment and the means to address the root causes of conflict.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on children and armed conflict, along with the Paris Principles, continue to provide an adequate frame of reference for action. Portugal invites all Member States that have not yet done so to consider endorsing the Paris Principles.

In conclusion, protecting children from the ravages of war is a moral imperative and a priority of international peace and security. The international community is equipped to improve the situation of children in armed conflicts and address the root causes of conflict, including through sustainable development, the promotion and protection of human rights and peacebuilding. It is our collective duty to do our utmost to end the suffering of children victims of armed conflicts and violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of San Marino.

Mr. Beleffi (San Marino): San Marino aligns itself with the statement previously made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this debate, as well as the briefers and participants for their contributions.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his commitment and his annual report (S/2018/465), and I would like to reiterate San Marino's support for the Security Council's children and armed conflict mandate.

The Secretary-General's report has documented a very alarming trend: in 2017 there was a massive increase in violations against children. Moreover, the repeated attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access as a tactic of war clearly show that civilians, and in particular children, are vulnerable and very likely to be subject to abuses and grave violations.

Unfortunately, children pay a very heavy price in armed conflicts. In the past year, children, boys and girls, were killed, maimed, abducted, raped and used as human shields, and many of them were recruited as soldiers. Furthermore, their schools have were targeted and destroyed, thereby denying children their basic rights, while health facilities were attacked and damaged, depriving them of the assistance they need.

While calling all parties to fully comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law, we also reiterate that it is crucial that the international community renew its engagement on the children and armed conflict agenda.

San Marino has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and has endorsed the Paris Commitments. San Marino calls for the endorsement and ratification of the relevant international instruments that strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. Respect for those instruments is key in order to protect civilians caught up in conflict. Today I am glad to announce that my country will join the Safe Schools Declaration, an important instrument for the protection of education facilities from military use during conflict.

As previous speakers have done, I would like to reiterate that protecting children affected by armed conflict can contribute to conflict prevention and sustaining peace. In that regard, placing children at the heart of peace processes is crucial. If we want to prevent their re-recruitment, effective reintegration is essential. We must put in place long-term alternatives to military life and support them through educational and vocational programmes, so that we can finally break the cycle of violence, consolidate peace and prevent conflicts from recurring.

San Marino commends the work of Ms. Virginia Gamba and her Office and welcomes the action plans signed in 2017.

We all need to do more to safeguard the protection of children and promote their rights. Those children should finally be given a chance to build their own futures and to become actors of peace for our communities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Yánez Loza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Sweden for convening this open debate. We believe it is essential that all States be able to express in the Security Council their concern about the situation of children in armed conflict.

Ecuador welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) and this morning's briefings, as well as the concept note (S/2018/625, annex) that you, Mr. President, provided us with to guide this meeting.

The situation of children is becoming increasingly worrisome owing to the number and seriousness of violations in countries in conflict. We see this in the reports submitted, which show that children are victims of State and non-State actors and that there is no collective and comprehensive response to protect them.

Ecuador expresses its concern at the continuing recruitment and use of children throughout the world. Despite the formal release of more than 10,000 children associated with armed forces or groups in 2017 and the arrangements that have been taken for their reintegration, 56 armed groups and state State forces continued to recruit and use children in conflicts around the world.

We believe that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16, related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as the promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies, can be achieved only when all States fully protect children.

In its Constitution, Ecuador recognizes children as a group deserving of special attention, and indicates that it is the State's responsibility to protect and care for them against all forms of violence, ill-treatment, sexual exploitation or exploitation of any other kind, as well as to eradicate all forms of violence to which they may be subjected. That is why we supported resolution 2427 (2018) this morning.

As we celebrate 18 years since the signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, we call for universal ratification of the Protocol and encourage States that have not yet done so to ratify it without delay. Similarly, we call for the cessation and prevention of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and stress the importance of adequate funding for gender-sensitive reintegration programmes, taking into account the particular needs of girls who have not been well served through traditional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.

The Secretary-General's report also underscores how schools are used for military purposes and points to the destruction of educational infrastructure. Ecuador expresses its full support for the need to protect students, teachers and educational infrastructure in situations of armed conflict, and stresses the importance of continuing education during armed conflict, as well as the implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting

Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

Our Constitution also stipulates that military service for citizens over 18 years of age is voluntary, and prohibits all forms of forced recruitment. Our Constitution also establishes that children and adolescents shall receive priority attention in the event of disasters, armed conflicts and any type of emergency. We therefore reiterate that the statistics provided to us must call for a comprehensive response from all States by not allowing impunity and providing appropriate political support and funding.

We believe that it is important to build and sustain peace, as peace is directly linked to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. We reaffirm Ecuador's commitment to leaving no one behind on the path to sustainable development, and we want to use this forum to pool efforts aimed at a productive and successful dialogue that highlights the situation of children and armed conflict and its importance for the global agenda.

Finally, we call for stronger support for the management of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict so that it may receive sufficient political support and funding.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by thanking the President of the Security Council, the Swedish Prime Minister, for organizing this open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/465) and appreciate the valuable inputs from the briefers.

A large increase in violations against children in 2017, as reported by the Secretary-General, is alarming. It serves to underline the need for redoubling our efforts to prevent the emergence of new conflicts. If we cannot protect children today, we will fail in preventing conflicts tomorrow. In turn, that means we will face a vicious circle of increases in both the number of conflicts and the loss of children's lives.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465) once again shows that, unfortunately, the scale of violations is alarming in many places, especially in the Palestinian occupied territories and Yemen. Throughout 2017, a large number of Palestinian children continued to be killed, injured, arrested and detained by Israeli forces. The exponential increase in the level of such violations during peaceful protests this year puts the Israeli regime at the top of the list of global child-killers. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the brutality of the Israeli forces against Palestinian children. Such acts are clear manifestations of war crimes and crime against humanity, and they are carried out with total impunity. They must come to an end and their perpetrators must be brought to justice. Failing to do so will only embolden Israel to kill more children.

That situation is the result of the Council's failure to meet its relevant responsibilities due to the use of the veto power by the United States, which thus extended unconditional impunity to the Israeli regime. Despite all the atrocities it has perpetrated against Palestinian children, the Israel Defence Forces has unfortunately never been blacklisted in the reports of the Secretary-General. We hope that the 2018 report will put Israel at the top of the list of violators of the rights of children in armed conflicts. That will bring accuracy, credibility and impartiality to that list.

The situation of children in Yemen, where, according to UNICEF, more than 2,200 children have been killed and nearly all children are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, is at best comparable only to the situation of Palestinian children. Saudi and Emirati forces, which seek only a military solution in Yemen, are responsible for the continuation of that conflict. Creating a separate category for the so-called improving violators in the Secretary-General's reports last year (S/2017/821) and this year, due to well-known political considerations, did not help to halt their brutality perpetrated against Yemeni children or change the realities on the ground. As the Secretary-General's report indicates, the killing of Yemeni children continued unabated, most recently in an airstrike on a wedding in July, during which at least seven children lost their lives.

The policy of deliberately killing children as a war tactic is utilized by Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). The aim of such a policy is to put maximum pressure on adversaries. The most notable cases are the mass killing of children by Israel in Lebanon in 2006, by ISIS in Syria in 2013 and by Saudi and Emirati forces in Yemen in 2018.

We call for accountability for any war crimes against children anywhere, be it in Palestine, Yemen, Myanmar or elsewhere. Adopting a selective approach in such cases is tantamount to betraying the most vulnerable people — children — whom this process is designed to protect.

The President (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully associates itself with the statements made by the observer of the European Union, by the representative of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and by the representative of Aregentina on behalf of the countries that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration.

At the outset, I would like to thank the speakers for their stimulating statements, and Sweden for organizing this debate and for giving Belgium the opportunity to participate. We also reiterate our support for resolution 2427 (2018), adopted this morning, which we co-sponsored. In that regard, I would like to commend Sweden's leadership on this issue, which has led, after lengthy discussions, to a robust text that brings new elements to the mandate.

We believe that prevention is the only lasting solution to the problem of children's participation in armed conflict. The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/465) stresses that preventing violations against children affected by conflict should be one of the main concerns of the international community. We must therefore do more to address the problem by ensuring the inclusion of child protection as an integral part of any comprehensive strategy to prevent and resolve conflict with a view to achieving sustainable peace and by encouraging the active participation of children in the development of such strategies.

It is also very important to enable children affected by armed conflict to undertake the journey from victim to child in a peaceful society. We welcome the release of more than 10,000 children and their reintegration into their communities in 2017. However, that is just a first step. We share the Secretary-General's view that it is vital to ensure strong and ongoing support for psychosocial and educational reintegration in order to break the cycle of violence and consolidate peace. Unfortunately, the psychosocial well-being of children is often forgotten, even if those invisible wounds are deep and take a very long time to heal. This work is essential as a prevention tool and breaks the vicious cycle of violence. I must underscore that long-term reintegration, including psychosocial support that exceeds the current six-month programmes is crucial. In that regard, I also wish to draw attention to the specific needs of girls. We must redouble our efforts to address the impact of conflict on girls.

The issue of children in armed conflict is multidimensional and requires a coordinated and comprehensive response involving all the relevant actors. Belgium therefore welcomes the approach of the Special Representative, who has initiated a process to strengthen cooperation with regional and subregional organizations.

Belgium intends to engage specifically on this issue during its term on the Security Council in the coming two years. The challenges are enormous, as borne out by the 35 per cent increase in serious violations in 2017 and the worrying trend of denial of humanitarian access for civilians as a new tactic of war.

In conclusion, Belgium appreciates the close cooperation with the Special Representative and looks forward to the opening of an office of the Special Representative in Brussels very soon.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Panama.

Mr. Arrocha Ruíz (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence of Prime Minister Stefan Löfven this morning and we applaud the initiative of the Swedish presidency for convening this timely debate to put in perspective the vulnerability of a high number of children affected by the scourge of armed conflicts and violence.

Panama aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the group of countries that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration.

The briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Gamba, as well as the contents of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465), confirm that the outlook is truly alarming. The marked increase in serious violations, confirmed by the United Nations, that have been perpetrated against children — not only last year — is unacceptable and reprehensible by any account. That is why we applaud the joint efforts of UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, as they are crucial given the current situation.

The magnitude of the impact on children deprived of their freedom and recruited into armed groups and forces in order to actively participate in conflicts is substantial, as we heard at first-hand this morning from Ms. Yenny Londoño, and we thank her for her courage in speaking to the Council.

Even worse are the appalling cases of killings, sexual exploitation and violence, collective violations, forced marriages with combatants, kidnappings, and sexual slavery and trafficking, which cannot be tolerated by any State, and the adoption and ratification of international instruments on the rights of children is therefore a key element in this respect.

Accountability for crimes and serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law in a rigorous judicial framework must be ensured. To this distressing panorama, in which the clear participation of certain Government forces and non-State armed groups has been made clear, we would add displaced children who are seeking safe haven from the increasing number of attacks against schools and hospitals, as well as those who are victims of abduction, including in particular girls being held in conflict zones, where they are more vulnerable to physical violations and the flouting of their most basic human rights.

Mr. President, we wish to emphasize the value of your concept note (S/2018/625, annex) in outlining key areas for the debate, in particular the urgent need to protect children and safeguard their rights. Although the report focuses on specific regions, my country believes that a coordinated response, in a spirit of solidarity, is a global obligation. Threats to peace and security increase the natural vulnerability of children, and collective endeavours to overcome this tragedy are of the greatest urgency. Human lives are at stake here. We do not have the right to deprive children of a safe present and future. States have an obligation to prevent violations that undermine respect for international law and for the human rights of children.

Aware of the global responsibility that has brought us here today and with firm political resolve, my country has deployed efforts beyond our region to contribute to the humanitarian assistance needed by the more than 30,000 Syrian children who are refugees in the Za'atari camp, in Jordan. With the assistance of UNICEF, we have dispatched Panamanian teachers who today are cooperating on an educational programme for these children, because we firmly believe that access to education and to a dignified life that offers opportunities is an inalienable right of all children.

Aware of the significant value of empowering young people so that they can become actors for peace, Panama will, in January 2019, host World Youth Day, to be led by Pope Francis. The event will be aimed at overcoming cultural and religious barriers and bring together young people from all corners of the world, with the common aim of achieving a culture of peace in order to build a better world.

In recent years, Governments have made forceful statements, signed conventions and promulgated legal texts guaranteeing the rights of children under the worst circumstances. However, implementation thereof is required in order to urgently translate the commitments made into realities on the ground. We therefore welcome the unanimous approval of resolution 2427 (2018), proposed by Sweden, as it contains elements of great value in this process. The link that it establishes between the protection, rights, welfare and empowerment of children is, in my country's view, vital in the framework of the preventive approach that should without a doubt be our objective.

I wish to conclude by reiterating Panama's firm commitment to contributing to the global effort to ensure the full protection of the rights of children in all areas, in particular when they are faced with the scourge of armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Romania.

Mr. Jinga (Romania): Romania aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Safe Schools Declaration.

I should now like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

Allow me first to thank the Swedish presidency of the Security Council for having organized this timely debate and the briefers for their comprehensive presentations.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465), presented last week, makes clear that the number of children affected by armed conflict and the severity of the grave violations affecting them have increased in the past year. It is appalling that in 2017 the United Nations verified more than 21,000 grave violations of children's rights ranging from the use of children as human bombs to rape and other forms of sexual violence, and from juvenile detention to the denial of humanitarian access.

Resolution 1261 (1999) formally acknowledged that the protection of children in armed conflict is a fundamental peace and security concern. The Security Council has also since 2001 tasked specific peacekeeping missions with undertaking child-protection efforts. However, the recruitment and use of children remain prevalent in areas where peacekeeping operations are deployed.

Children associated with armed forces or armed groups both witness and commit acts of violence and are themselves exploited, injured or killed as a result. Such situations deprive them of their human rights and educational opportunities. They often suffer severe physical and emotional consequences that dramatically impact their personal development and can have long-term effects on peace and security in the countries concerned.

We would like to commend Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba for her efforts to increase engagement with parties to conflict in order to achieve progress and implement action plans leading to concrete results, as more than 10,000 children have been formally released from armed groups and begun a process of reintegration. We also commend UNICEF and its partners for having reintegrated more than 12,000 children into their communities.

Romania supports the Secretary-General's peace agenda and the United Nations demarches to build sustaining peace. Tackling the root causes of conflict and ensuring children's access to education are key factors if we want this approach to succeed. At the same time, we must keep in mind the best interests of the child, especially in cases involving former child soldiers, who require protection and support in order to reintegrate into their societies.

In this respect, Romania endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, and the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. My country also endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and we encourage all parties to implement the provisions of these initiatives. We also reaffirm our readiness to continue to work closely with United Nations institutions for the benefit of children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro.

Mrs. Đurišić (Montenegro): Let me first thank the Swedish presidency for having organized this timely and important open debate on the protection of children in armed conflict, as well as for its work on resolution 2427 (2018), which the Security Council adopted this morning. We also thank the briefers for their remarkable presentations and their work on the protection of children in conflict situations.

Montenegro fully associates itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. I would, however, like to make some additional remarks.

Conflicts have a devastating and enduring impact on the world and on each individual. We should all be disturbed by the Secretary-General's latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465), as well as by the briefers' presentations. As stated in the report, which Montenegro welcomes, it is children in particular who face obstacles ranging from discrimination, marginalization and poverty to violence. Young people are the main victims of conflicts today, and they are dealing with unacceptable risks to their lives and suffering as a result of attacks on schools and hospitals and denials of humanitarian access.

The issue of children and armed conflict is a global one that demands a shared response. In the wake of some recent progress, we, as the international community, must focus more on preventing violations against children affected by conflict if we are to avoid the possibility of losing entire generations in many countries around the world. The Security Council has made significant progress in this area, and its adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) today is a step forward in advancing the agenda on children and armed conflict, protecting children's rights and ensuring that those responsible for grave violations against children are held to account. Montenegro considers the agreement and implementation of United Nations action plans to be a vital step in improving the protection of children. All the parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report should put such measures in place.

We must improve our efforts to prevent human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Montenegro has ratified the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and endorsed such non-legally binding commitments as the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. We have also endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and we strongly encourage other Member States to do the same. We support international peace operations as an efficient and dynamic instrument for monitoring respect for human rights and building sustainable institutions in conflict areas. A strong component for the protection of children should be incorporated into peacekeeping and prevention mandates and the sustaining peace agenda. That would also require peacekeepers, military and security personnel to receive specialized predeployment training in child protection.

In addition, we should prioritize the effective reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups. Both girls and boys must receive the support they need to alleviate their suffering and help them reintegrate into their communities without prejudice or stigma. That requires education and engagement. We believe it is crucial to ensure that children continue to have access to education even in times of crisis. Education can have a positive effect on their development and give them the skills they need to work for more sustainable peace and advocate for better future themselves. Children are innocent bystanders in times of conflict. They deserve protection and support as well as justice and opportunity. We should redouble our efforts at every level to protect them, get them back to school and treat them as every society's vital assets. Only that approach can enable us to have an impact on the well-being of future generations and to face the challenges of securing a lasting global peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I would like to express our appreciation to the Swedish presidency for convening this important debate, in line with Sweden's principled defence of international law and the protection it provides, especially for those who are most vulnerable, including refugees and migrants and the children among them. I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/465), and am grateful to the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their valuable briefings and the representative of civil society from Colombia for her powerful speech. The State of Palestine also welcomes the Council's unanimous adoption today of resolution 2427 (2018).

The protection of civilians has been seen as a top priority since the Second World War. More than 70 years later, it is therefore difficult to explain the gap that has persisted between States' clear legal obligations and their failure to ensure accountability, which continues to render civilians, including children, extremely vulnerable in situations of armed conflict around the world. Prevention, protection and accountability are indispensable for saving future generations from the scourge of war. The State of Palestine stresses the importance of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, as well as for human rights and refugee law, as they are central to the protection of children and all civilians in armed conflict, including those suffering under foreign occupation. We underline the importance of international criminal law for holding the perpetrators of crimes accountable, providing justice to victims and preventing any recurrence of crimes.

Having acceded to the core conventions relating to human rights and international humanitarian law, and to the International Criminal Court, the State of Palestine has also acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We have also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and support the joint statement made today in that regard. We call for the universal acceptance and implementation of all the relevant legal instruments.

Children must be protected from killing and maiming, recruitment, arrest, detention and ill treatment. Deliberate attacks on schools and closures of educational institutions, as well as denials of humanitarian access, must cease. The children of Palestine have been enduring all of these ills for decades with a striking lack of protection, despite the laws intended to protect all children and our repeated calls for the protection of the Palestinian civilian population. At a time when everyone stresses the importance of psychosocial support to children suffering from the consequences of armed conflicts, Palestinian children are about to be deprived of such support, owing to the defunding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Israeli occupying forces' intentional targeting of peaceful protesters in the Gaza Strip, including children, and the forced transfer of civilians in Abu Nuwar and Khan Al-Ahmar, which affects Palestinian children most of all, are only the most recent examples in that regard. We hope that the upcoming report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, will include practical recommendations to assure protection for our people, including children. Palestine emphasizes that all these well-documented Israeli crimes plead clearly for including Israel and its settlers on the list of parties committing grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict. The failure to include them seriously affects the list's credibility and makes it vulnerable to criticisms that it is politicized.

The Secretary-General's report should have made specific reference to Israel's prolonged military and colonial occupation and its ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip as the foundation for its widespread and systematic violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and human rights, including rules aimed at protecting children. The absence of such explicit references fails to reflect the reality on the ground and undermines the efforts to address the root causes of the conflict and the ongoing mass violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. We also call on the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to publicly denounce the crimes committed against Palestinian children. We believe that an expression of this kind would have been important during Israel's violent repression of peaceful protests in the Gaza Strip, in which 19 Palestinian children have been killed to date.

We do, however, fully recognize the critical role that the United Nations plays in Palestine, and we would like to express our appreciation for it, particularly to UNRWA, which is going through one of the most severe crises in its history. We want to appeal once again for urgent support to the Agency so that it can continue fulfilling its vital mandate, including for the provision of education, which all agree is central to ensuring children's protection, well-being and development. As the painful situation in Palestine demonstrates, only by ending impunity for violations and crimes against children can we preserve their lives, their rights and the future they embody.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I congratulate Sweden on its presidency of the Security Council and applaud its commitment to gender balance among the briefers of the Council this month. The United Arab Emirates supports Sweden's dedicated focus on the issue of children and armed conflict, and its convening of today's debate.

I also thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, and civil society representative Yenny Londoño for their insightful briefings earlier today.

There is nothing more universal than the principle that children are entitled to special protection. That is something that we can all agree on, no matter our policy positions or how entrenched our disagreements may be. The knot in the pit of your stomach when you realize what is happening to children around the world affects us all because it is an affront to our shared humanity. For this reason, we should all be extremely concerned by the significant increase of verified grave violations against children in 2017.

Children are entitled to special protection not only because they deserve a future, but also because they represent our future. We know that there is nowhere on Earth where children's futures are more under threat than in my own region, where children suffer enormously from the deluge of current crises. And this poses an existential threat to the future of the Middle East, where 60 per cent of the population of the Arab World is under the age of 30. Throughout our region, the United Arab Emirates is firmly committed to the protection of children affected by conflict, both by providing humanitarian aid and ensuring their long-term well-being.

As Special Representative Gamba mentioned in her briefing, the number of violations against children around the world in 2017 was unacceptably high. In Syria in particular, there were more abuses against children than ever before as the unresolved conflict endures as one of the most heartbreaking crises of our time. Extremist and terrorist groups in our region also continue to pose a serious threat to children. Da'esh in Syria and Iraq and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, for example, kill, abduct, recruit for suicide bombings, and sexually abuse children. They are also responsible for the attacks and the manufacture of explosive devices that cause child casualties and damage to infrastructure critical to the welfare and safety of children. These are deliberate tactics at the core of the modus operandi of extremists and terrorists.

We call on the international community to hold violent perpetrators of such atrocities to account.

Old conflicts create suffering for children equal to that in newer ones. In the longest and most entrenched of the crisis in our region, we are appalled by Israel's neglect of children in the occupied Palestinian territories and its detention of hundreds of Palestinian children in 2017. Such actions, as well as violence against children across the occupied Palestinian territories, will do nothing but continue to undermine Israel's security.

We are also concerned with violations in the regions that surround us. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab continues to terrorize children and their families through heinous crimes, including public executions of children. In Myanmar, Rohingya Muslim children continue to be persecuted as part of ongoing violence against that very unprotected community.

Allow me to also address the situation in Yemen, since the United Arab Emirates is a member of the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen, which has been the focus of some in this discussion today. The coalition takes its responsibility for protecting all civilians in armed conflict — particularly children — very seriously. The coalition has sustained efforts and will continue to do more to minimize the impact of the conflict on children, because we believe deeply that every innocent child killed or injured in the conflict is a loss too many. The coalition closely coordinates with all United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations on the ground to ensure the protection of children, and this will continue.

To that end, in coordination with Special Representative Gamba, the coalition established a dedicated child protection unit, embedded within coalition headquarters, as a means of improving the protection of children. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Special Representative Gamba for her close engagement with the coalition, and reiterate the United Arab Emirates's deep appreciation for her important mandate. Our continuous efforts to strengthen the protection of children have yielded positive results, including through the reintegration of Yemeni children who were recruited by the Houthi militia into their communities.

While we work to protect children in Yemen, the Houthis continue to terrorize the population. We condemn their complete disregard for children and their violations of international humanitarian law. Among their worst offences are the despicable use of children as child soldiers and human shields, the use of civilian hospitals and schools for military purposes, the indiscriminate laying of landmines, as well as missile attacks on Saudi Arabia against its civilian population.

There is no better way to halt the tragedy of children being unprotected in armed conflict than preventing conflict from breaking out in the first place. To that end, we call for better integrating child protection and prevention efforts. We fully support the Secretary-General's recommendations in his report (S/2018/465) , and call on the Security Council to reinforce those actions.

We also call for the full implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, with its emphasis on conflict prevention and the meaningful participation of women. The involvement of women in prevention efforts will reap dividends for protecting children in the long term. Moreover, young people and their active participation in building peaceful and inclusive societies is also key to protecting children and preventing conflict. Key to that is education. To that end, we support the focus in the United Kingdom's statement today on educating as part of our security and development efforts, including achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Finally, regarding the monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the Children and Armed Conflict report, we support the guidelines on which the mechanisms are based and believe they should depend on reliable sources and independent United Nations observers. In addition, we encourage the Special Representative's Office to work and consult with concerned States to share insights and give input ahead of drawing conclusions in order to better inform and empower a stronger and more robust child protection architecture, focused on prevention..

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I wish to thank Sweden, this month's presidency, for holding this open debate on children and armed conflict. The Maldives congratulates the Council on today's adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), on children in armed conflict, which the Maldives was pleased to co-sponsor. The resolution provides a comprehensive framework for mainstreaming the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflicts.

Children carrying automatic rifles that are taller than them, or little girls and boys rescued from the rubble of buildings shattered by missiles, are images that have endured with us for so many decades. These are images that come to mind when we think of children and armed conflicts. There are tens of thousands of children who are affected by or who suffer from armed conflicts — the thousands of children who are killed or massacred, and those who have to live with scars of abuse in conflicts for the rest of their lives.

Open debates such as this and resolutions such as the one that the Council adopted today will be meaningful only if we, the Member States, are sincere in our efforts in implementing the resolutions. Members of the Security Council can start such an effort by reducing the flow of weapons from their countries to conflict zones. The Council can also forge a closer link between the topic of children in armed conflict and other broader topics on conflict resolution, such as sustaining peace, or the discussions on the protection of civilians In almost every instance, it is the supply of weapons, both legal and illegal, that exacerbates conflicts. At the same time, the Council has to, as a matter of urgency, take a more holistic approach to promoting the causes of peace. Attempts to manage crises or to respond to developments in conflict hotspots should not define the Council.

The Council should work with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme to encourage national Governments to take stronger actions in promoting the key aspects of the resolution. Real progress can be made through longer-term development strategies. The Council must recognize the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children in situations of armed conflict.

No child should be trapped in any conflict or war, for it is our responsibility to ensure their safety. We can achieve that only if we, the international community, work together to address the most fundamental root causes of conflicts. We must devise our strategies to realize the aspirations of children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): Let me join my colleagues in congratulating the Swedish presidency and expressing our gratitude for its convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict. Let me also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and the other briefers for their reports and studies.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union earlier today. In my national capacity, I should like to make the following remarks.

We welcome the recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465), which unveils gross violations of child rights and the dire situation facing children in many conflict situations. According to the report, there were at least 6,000 verified violations against children by Government forces and more than 15,000 verified violations by the range of non-State armed groups in 2017. Asymmetric attacks by non-State armed groups had a particularly severe impact on children in areas controlled by non-State armed actors and terrorist groups.

The report also states that in situations where Governments and armed groups have enhanced the prevention of grave violations, important advances have been achieved. Over 10,000 children were released and over 12,000 children were reintegrated by UNICEF in 2017. And yet we have to see even more tangible results on the ground. It is therefore vital that the Member States enhance their engagement in strengthening the child protection mechanisms.

Georgia has prioritized the protection of the rights of children in all aspects of life by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. My Government spares no effort to assist children affected by conflicts and forced displacement, both in Abkhazia and in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and to guarantee adequate living conditions for them by extending welfare programmes and the implementation of relevant strategy.

At the same time, we are extremely concerned that the fundamental human rights of children continue to be violated on a daily basis in both occupied regions of Georgia. Since 2015, the Georgian language has been banned as a language of instruction in the first grades at the remaining Georgian schools in Gali district, gradually resulting in the total restriction of education in the native language in the Abkhazia region. In the academic period 2015-2017, about 4,000 pupils were deprived of the right to receive their education in their native Georgian language. A similar process has been initiated in the Tskhinvali region.

To make matters worse, the children who cross the occupation line to attend classes in Georgian schools located in the adjacent area controlled by the Government of Georgia fall victim to Russian occupying forces, who inspect their schoolbags and, in cases of discovering Georgian books inside, hold them detained for hours. This kind of treatment, in violation of internationally recognized norms and principles, places children under immense psychological and emotional pressure and has an unbearable impact on their future.

We fully realize the importance of ensuring the protection of children in the occupied territories of Georgia and use all the available formats to advance both the protection of the rights of children and peaceful conflict resolution. In this respect, the Government of Georgia recently presented a new peace initiative, entitled A Step to a Better Future, seeking to improve the humanitarian, social and economic conditions of the populations, including children and young people, residing in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

Against this backdrop, while reaffirming our commitment to the protection of the fundamental rights of the child, we call for increased attention of the international community in order to protect children's rights in the occupied regions of Georgia and other conflict-affected areas around the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Mero (United Republic of Tanzania): At the outset, allow me to welcome the Swedish initiative to convene this ministerial-level open debate on children and armed conflict under the theme "Protecting children today prevents conflict tomorrow". I thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF and others for their briefings.

United Nations reports indicate that more than 10,000 children were killed or maimed amid armed conflicts worldwide last year, while others were raped, forced to serve as armed soldiers or caught in attacks on schools and hospitals. Furthermore, a total of more than 21,000 violations of children's rights were reported in 2017, according to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465).

The United Republic of Tanzania is greatly concerned by violations of the rights and interests of children and supports the efforts of the United Nations to protect children in armed conflicts. That is why currently we have over 2,000 troops deployed in various United Nations peacekeeping missions, including those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, Lebanon, the Central Africa Republic and South Sudan. In this regard, I would like to emphasize the following few points.

First, to prevent children from participating in armed conflict requires a comprehensive solution. Efforts should be made to prevent, mitigate and resolve conflicts by addressing root causes. The process should be owned by the respective States. The United Nations and regional and subregional organizations should supplement those efforts.

Secondly, prevention-oriented training programmes regarding the protection of children through security sector reform should be given priority.

Thirdly, women security sector actors can make distinct and valuable contributions to peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding efforts. They can offer important ideas on communities and cultures and provide the option of new preventive approaches to dealing with the use of child soldiers.

Fourthly, increasing aid and capacity-building to conflict-ridden countries in order to rebuild infrastructure and health systems could be very helpful.

To conclude, let me reiterate the importance of addressing the root causes of armed conflicts, including poverty in some countries, which is the most conclusive way of ending the majority of them. The United Republic of Tanzania will continue to work with the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations in preventing armed conflict and thereby protect children from the effects of war. Children must be protected.

The President: I thank the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania for staying within the three-minute limit. He was one of the first to have done so today, and I appreciate that very much.

I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Muhammad Bande (Nigeria): I thank you, Sir, for convening this very important open debate. The protection of children is indeed a moral imperative and a legal obligation of all States. We thank all briefers for their insightful statements, which have broadened our understanding of the achievements and the challenges we continue to face in our collective efforts to protect children.

Conflict situations put all at great risk and children at an even greater risk, particularly where non-State armed groups are involved. They risk being killed, abducted or maimed. Children are vulnerable in other ways; they face sexual abuse, recruitment as child soldiers, trafficking, slavery and other atrocities committed by armed groups. This situation underscores the need for States, the United Nations, regional organizations and other stakeholders to take urgent measures to enhance the protection of children affected by conflict.

Nigeria condemns, in the strongest terms, the mass abductions of children, including those carried out by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all abducted children. We demand that parties to armed conflicts immediately cease unlawful attacks and threats of attacks against schools, students and teachers. To that end, we welcome the release of the abducted Chibok and Dapchi girls and assure the Council that our efforts will continue until all abducted children are released.

On 29 May 2015, Nigeria was among the first States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration in Oslo, Norway, thereby making a strong pledge to better protect schools by, inter alia, using and promoting the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. We call on Member States that have not yet done so to endorse the Declaration. We believe that this initiative will promote and protect the right of children to education. The Declaration complements and strengthens our existing national safe schools initiative, established in 2014 as part of the response of the Government of Nigeria to promote safe zones for learning.

The Government of Nigeria has also taken steps to cater to victims of Boko Haram terrorism — in the form of rape and other sexual violence against children, the abduction of children and other grave violations — by putting in motion several legal and social remedies. Some of the remedies undertaken by the Government include the diligent prosecution of more than 200 detained Boko Haram terrorists in competent courts of law, as well as reintegration, reorientation and rehabilitation programmes designed to meet the needs of each victim of sexual violence.

Regional and subregional organizations also have an important role to play in addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflict. At the subregional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has shown a strong commitment to promoting the welfare and well-being of children affected by conflict through its Accra Declaration on War-Affected Children in West Africa, adopted in April 2000. The Declaration commits ECOWAS member States to taking a broad range of measures to protect and rehabilitate war-affected children.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is also an important tool for advancing children's rights. While building on the same basic principles as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Union children's Charter highlights issues of special importance in the African context.As of January 2014, all AU member States had signed the Charter. In that regard, we welcome the growing cooperation between the United Nations and the AU in protecting African children from the impact of armed conflict.

Nigeria is firmly committed to meeting its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Those instruments have been incorporated into our laws at both the national and sub-national levels. They include extensive provisions against the abuse of the rights of children, and we are determined to enforce them.

We would like to take this opportunity to commend the work of the Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict, as well as to acknowledge the importance of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children in armed conflict. We emphasize the importance of resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), which, inter alia, urge all parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education and encourage Member States to consider concrete measures to deter the use of schools by armed forces and armed non-State Groups in contravention of applicable international laws.

In conclusion, it is within our capacity to safeguard the vulnerable from the ravages of conflict and other breaches of peace and security. We therefore reiterate our commitment to continue to work assiduously to improve the welfare of children in line with our obligations under all the relevant international instruments.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your friendly country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I would also like to thank His Excellency Prime Minister Stefan Löfven for his personal participation in part of the Council's work today. I also express our appreciation for the convening of this open debate on the subject of children and armed conflict under the theme "Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow".

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia appreciates the work of the United Nations and its agencies and the important role they play to spare children the ravages of war and the pain of the diasporas to which they are exposed every day in different parts of the world. A child is killed in Gaza. Another child is recruited in Afghanistan. Yet another child is being armed in Sa'ada. Children in Syria are being asphyxiated by toxic gases. And many children's rights throughout the world are violated by various terrorist organizations.

We very much appreciate the efforts made in the preparation of the report of the Secretary -General on today's topic (S/2018/465). We express our country's support for all actions and precautionary measures being taken to safeguard the safety of children, put an end to the loss of life among civilians and prevent the destruction of infrastructure.

The Palestinian people continue to face the most heinous kind of occupation. The children of Gaza in particular live under an extremely unjust embargo that has been in place for more than 10 years. We witnessed the Israeli occupation's defiance of the international community and humanity itself several weeks ago when in the course of several days it killed scores of innocent children who were peacefully demonstrating to express themselves and call for their rights. It is truly painful to note that similar things are taking place at the hands of Syrian authorities in Dar'a, which is the cradle of the Syrian revolution. Syrian children took to the streets in peaceful marches in that city to condemn injustice and tyranny and call for their rights, justice and a bright future. The regime responded with a level of brutality that continues to this day.

We appreciate your initiative, Mr. President, in putting forward resolution 2427 (2018) in order to develop an international framework to protect children from armed conflict. We hope that the resolution will lead to supporting the task force for protecting children in armed conflict. However, we had hoped that the resolution would call on United Nations bodies dealing with this issue to ensure the accuracy of the data and statistics they gather and not to use one-side and unreliable information. We had also hoped that it would call for supporting the office on children and armed conflict and providing it with human and financial resources to make it self-sufficient in collecting information and avoiding unreliable sources.

The record of my country and its partners in the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen is an honourable one. The fact is that during the operation to liberate Al-Hudaydah the Coalition has proved that it is exercising a maximum degree of self-restraint and abiding by all the relevant international conventions, covenants and laws. The coalition also cooperated continuously during the recent months with the United Nations. That led to updating and upgrading the rules of engagement and the identification of thousands of prohibited sites, including schools, hospitals, civilian places and other infrastructure. A unit was establishment by the coalition to protect children and to find and reintegrate children bearing arms and return them through Yemeni authorities to their families. The programmes carried out by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre have become a model in providing children with protection and rehabilitation. The Centre will cooperate with the United Nations to share its experience throughout the world.

The Houthi militias in Yemen, supported by Iran, recruit children, force them to participate in the war and use them as human shields. They also launch missiles from civilian areas. All of that is a flagrant violation of international law and humanitarian principles. We call on the Council to condemn such acts in the strongest terms, as well as the parties supporting the militias, which continue to fail to implement international resolutions. They are the same parties that export their corrupt ideologies, destruction and discord to promote their sectarian agendas and obscurantist thinking. They do not take into account the well-being of children, who are the flowers of life and should be going to school and playing in parks and playgrounds.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation congratulates the delegation of the Kingdom of Sweden on presiding over the Security Council for this month. I also thank His Excellency Prime Minister Stefan Löfven for personally presiding over this constructive and important debate. We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, for their tireless efforts in assisting and supporting children all over the world.

Iraq held detailed dialogues with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary -General in the period leading up to the preparation of this report (S/2018/465).

Iraq provided very accurate information from specialized offices — in the Ministries of Justice, Defence, the Interior, and Labour and Social Affairs — in response to all of the queries that were made during the consultations. In that regard, we would like to clarify our position on some of the points in the report for the period under review.

First, pertaining to the claims of airstrikes against schools, generally speaking airstrikes were carried out by air force jets against military targets of the terrorist group Da'esh. The strikes were carried out using confirmed intelligence reports in cooperation with the coalition air forces joint command, and employing laser-guided missiles inside the city to avoid hitting civilians.

Secondly, the air force command was not informed of any strikes against civilian targets during the liberation process.

Thirdly, with regard to military use of schools and hospitals, units of the Ministry of Defence did not use civilian facilities for military purposes, particularly schools and hospitals. The units do not remain in any given area during military operations; they continue to move in the direction of their targets. Once a city is liberated there is no need to use civilian facilities.

Fourthly, with regard to accountability when it comes to children accused of association with the terrorist group Da'esh, we deal with such children in accordance with our 1983 Minors Act Number 76 and the amendments thereto. The law provides for preferential treatment for minors when it comes to investigation and judicial proceedings. In that regard, special courts for minors have been set up under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Fifthly, the process of liberating cities occupied by terrorist organizations at times required the presence of military forces in some civilian facilities so that mine action and the removal of explosive ordnance left behind by the terrorist group Da'esh could take place, so as to safeguard civilians from risks and threats and allow the displaced to return.

Since the publication of last year's report (S/2017/821), Iraq has been continuously cooperating with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict to address the violations against the children of Iraq during our confrontation with terrorists, so as to rehabilitate and integrate them into society. In accordance with resolution 1612 (2005), our Prime Minister sent a letter to the Special Representative in January in which he expressed Iraq's full readiness to cooperate with the United Nations regional task force on monitoring and reporting to develop a joint action plan to address any violations or abuses related to the legal provisions on recruiting minors, in line with the recommendations of the Prime Minister and with the National Security Council as the focal point for the dialogue with the United Nations.

We must clarify to the international community that, while there have been images in newspapers of young men who appear to be under-aged, those have been exceptional cases from areas subject to direct acts of aggression by the terrorist group Da'esh. As a result, some families and clans began defending themselves while Iraqi armed forces were not yet present. For example, I would point to the city of Al-Haditha, where people resisted the terrorists and prevented them from entering.

On 26 February, Iraq invited the Office of the Special Representative to visit Iraq and to support the efforts being made to treat children who were impacted while combating terrorism. On the basis of that invitation, a working group from the Office visited Iraq from 5 to 8 March, during which it met with the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, in addition to other meetings with representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice and the National Security Council. On 22 October 2017, our Prime Minister authorized the establishment of a high-level national committee on monitoring and reporting with a view to protecting the rights of children from violations. The committee, which is chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, also met with the working group of the Special Representative on 7 March, to which it subsequently submitted recommendations. Work and coordination are currently under way in Baghdad between Iraq, represented by the high-level committee, and the office of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq and UNICEF with a view to developing a mutually agreeable action plan.

Consequently, we hope that accuracy is considered when including information in this report. Such information should be verified, so as to avoid inaccurate information and information gleaned from sources hostile to Iraq. We stress that inaccurate information contained in the reports that are issued by United Nations bodies and committees often poses a burden for a country defending its land and facing some of the most ferocious terrorist groups in the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mrs. Hassan (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the Swedish Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Stefan Löfven, for having convened this important debate on the fate of children in armed conflict under the theme "Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow". I should also like to thank Ms. Gamba, Ms. Fore and Ms. Londoño for their contributions to today's debate. We would also like to thank the Swedish delegation for its concept note prepared for this meeting (S/2018/625, annex), which once again reflects Sweden's commitment to this noble cause.

Djibouti believes that resolution 2427 (2018), adopted this morning and in which we were involved, is a concrete response to the call to action launched by the President.

The changing and complicated nature of conflict today means that we must constantly review and adapt the mechanisms and strategies we use to protect children in areas of conflict. According to the report of the Secretary-General under consideration today (S/2018/465), children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict in many countries. Unfortunately,

> "[i]n 2017, there was a large increase in the number of violations compared with the number reported for 2016" (*S/2018/465, para. 5*).

We view that statement as an urgent call to find solutions to this issue. Allow me to underscore Djibouti's commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and especially to preotecting children, who are particularly affected. I should like to undercore four points relative to protecting children caught up in armed conflict.

Djibouti has always supported and implemented international instruments on protecting children. We are proud to have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflict. In that regard, although most countries have set 18 as the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces, 43 other States have yet to do so. It is inconceivable that we can today consider continuing to exploit the vulnerable situation of children and target them for conscription and recruitment into armed conflict.

Secondly, Djibouti is proud to have joined and signed the Safe Schools Declaration and is committed to taking advantage of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Respecting and protecting the right to education in times of armed conflict is a crucial factor in the reconstruction of a post-conflict country.

Thirdly, we must also strengthen our dialogue with regional and subregional actors, in particular the African Union. My delegation would also like to recall Africa's contribution to the fight against this phenomenon, including the adoption, in 1996, of the Cape Town Principles on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa. The Cape Town Principles have been a source of inspiration for the international community in its action for the protection of children, in particular through the adoption of the Paris Principles, which today constitute a key instrument in the field of protecting children in conflicts.

Fourthly, my country, a haven of peace that is enjoying great political stability in a troubled region, has always sought to provide, despite its meagre resources and reception capacities, an adequate level of protection for refugees and migrants, and particularly for children. The Government of Djibouti has always taken the necessary steps to ensure that they receive the assistance and protection required by their situation. In the field of education, in 2016, we committed to providing basic education programmes that meet their needs. In the health field, medical and hospital care services are provided to everyone in our territory.

We are currently working with UNICEF to open a logistics platform in Djibouti. With our support, UNICEF will expand its operations in Djibouti to support the various humanitarian programmes implemented by the United Nations in more than 20 countries in Africa and Asia.

We remain concerned about the ongoing destabilization activities in the Republic of Djibouti, in particular through the recruitment, training and provision of arms and equipment to approximately 100 young Djiboutians, some of them minors, in violation of international humanitarian law. Successive reports by the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea have extensively documented this situation. Eritrea must definitively cease its destabilization activities and liberate the territory it has illegally occupied for 10 years now. To demonstrate its desire for a definitive resolution of the border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti, Eritrea must agree to submit to international arbitration. Djibouti is fully prepared to do so. The Horn of Africa region needs and deserves peace.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of a comprehensive approach that takes due account of the political, economic, social and legal dimensions of child protection and emphasizes a preventive and proactive approach.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Venezuela congratulates Sweden on the convening of today's open debate, while welcoming today's adoption of resolution 2427 (2018). We would also like to thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore for their briefings, as well as Ms. Yenny Londoño for her testimony, and express our appreciation for their efforts to promote and protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict.

The concept note prepared for today's debate (S/2018/625, annex) begins by citing Graça Machel's 1996 report (see A/51/306), in which she stated that the most effective way to protect children is to prevent armed conflict. Venezuela fully concurs with this proposition. We believe that the best strategy to protect children from participating in and the consequences of war is to prevent and resolve conflict situations through a comprehensive approach to their structural causes. It is a fact that in many cases the socioeconomic vulnerability, ethnic and religious intolerance, discrimination and the exclusion of children as a result of war facilitate their participation in hostilities and accentuate the harmful impact of armed conflict on them.

That is why it is essential to prevent the use and recruitment of children in armed conflict and to ensure their protection and rights in such situations, thereby overcoming the vicious cycle of violence. In addition, another fundamental factor in the prevention of armed conflicts is the cessation of all foreign military intervention and induced wars, as well as the end of destabilizations of entire societies for geopolitical and economic purposes, the transfer of arms, the financing and training of extremist and terrorist groups and the provision of shelter to them. Accordingly, we urge all States to act in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of international instruments and the resolutions of both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

It is tragic and ethically unacceptable that year after year we continue to read in the reports on the subject before us that serious difficulties persist in protecting children affected by armed conflict who "continue to be disproportionately affected by war" (*S/2018/465, para. 5*), and that in many of these cases the situation of violations of children's rights have worsened, as reflected in the report before the Council today by its statement that

> "[i]n 2017, there was a large increase in the number of violations compared with the number reported for 2016" (*ibid.*).

Venezuela reiterates its categorical opposition to, and condemnation of, all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law against children in armed conflict, and calls on all parties to conflict to comply with their obligations under international law. Likewise, it must be a moral imperative for the United Nations to act consistently when we talk about actions to protect children in armed conflict. The practice of double standards in these areas only undermines international efforts for the protection of children.

In that regard, we call for the full application of international justice to crimes and violations committed against Palestinian children in the wake of the multiple acts of aggression that the occupying Power has imposed on their country. It is observed with shame when some countries call for the perpetrators of violations against children in armed conflict to be brought to justice, yet when Palestinian children are the subject they remain silent. It is also necessary to continue to support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, including the deployment of capacities specifically dedicated to child protection, which are being carried out in countries within the framework of the peacebuilding architecture, as they are a key factor in an effective and sustainable transition from war to peace.

In conclusion, Venezuela wishes to reiterate that the protection of children affected by situations of armed conflict must be a fundamental premise for all States Members of the United Nations, as well as for the entire United Nations system, at all stages of a conflict. Accordingly, we will continue to be committed to providing our strong support and assistance to efforts that, in accordance with international law, help and protect children as an urgent ethical commitment.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Locsin (Philippines): Within this Chamber, we talk about the human rights of children — the right to life, to a name, to education and to health, inter alia. Today I want to mention another right — their right not to know. Children have the right not to know at first hand the horrors of war. They have the right not to know the weight of a rifle or the sharpness of its edges as it strikes them. They have the right not to know fear, particularly the fear they must feel when they are staring down the barrel of a gun aimed at them. They have the right not to know hate, the tempestuous hate that is assuaged only by murdering its object. Except perhaps on the screens of their Xboxes and Nintendos, children have the right not to know what the battlefield looks like. It is one place where they do not belong within the militant's malignant embrace.

The Philippines shares the United Nations profound desire to keep children away from armed conflict and — should it be unavoidable that they find themselves in the middle of battle — to keep them safe. The depth of our disdain for armed groups recruiting children and using them as human shields can be measured only by our grim determination to fight them. Such armed groups are beneath contempt. Our country has suffered human, social and economic costs from armed conflicts waged by them. The suffering is multiplied when children and youth are involved because of the psychological cost of war, which is immeasurable, as it is borne by the children as they grow into adulthood, and impacts the nation's future.

In May 2017, militants affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham took Marawi, a city in the southern part of the Philippines. After five long months of fighting, Government forces took back the city, but not without huge costs in terms of the casualties that they suffered and damage to the city. Regrettably children recruited by the militants were hurt in the fighting. Schools occupied by militants were taken back. The city was destroyed, thereby confirming the irony that sometimes a village must be destroyed in order to save it because it cannot be left in militant hands behind an advancing army's back. But one could always surround or go around a school and leave it behind.

Rebellion and armed conflict are complex issues, but they do not defy solutions. My Government is tirelessly seeking a resolution to those conflicts. Achieving peace remains at the core of the Philippine President's agenda. The six-point peace and development agenda aims to bring about new peace agreements, always and consistently in compliance with human rights and our democratic Constitution, while diametrically opposed to the tyranny of terror and forever adamant in enforcing the civil and human rights found in political constitutions familiar to the civilized world. It is designed to promote a culture of peace and conflict sensitivity, and achieve a peace that fosters catch-up economic development in conflict areas.

Earlier this year, the President ordered his Peace Secretary to resume talks with the communist rebels. They rejected it. The armed forces of the Philippines are mandated to be a primary duty-bearer not only of peace, but especially of the safety of children in armed conflict. Under its regulation called "children protection during armed conflict situations", children are afforded special protection in armed-conflict situations. Those rescued or recovered, including those apprehended for alleged association with rebel armed groups, are handed over to the local social welfare officer for processing and psychosocial services. Both the armed forces and the commission for the welfare of children work with UNICEF to end child rights violations. For that, the Army has received scant credit, while enemies of the State are repeatedly eulogized for their repeatedly avowed and never-fulfilled intention to end their recruitment of child soldiers.

Childhood should be the most cherished stage of a person's life. All are entitled to know the innocent joys from which we are all compelled to graduate into the world that adults make. We are committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols to uphold children's rights and welfare. That commitment is guided by the third national action plan for children in the Philippine plan of action for the elimination of violence against children. Executive order 138 strengthens the children in armed conflict programme which involves human rights training, monitoring, reporting and responding to violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict. The militants are not bound by any of those conventions, protocols or plans in their predation, and their vision of society is never hospitable to the idea that children are outside the scope of war as opposed to one of its spoils.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kenya.

Mr. Amayo (Kenya): I congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the Month of July and commend the initiative to hold this open debate on children and armed conflict. This forum provides all Member States with the opportunity to deliberate on the challenges facing children affected by or involved in armed conflict and seeking solutions on how to protect children today to prevent conflicts tomorrow.

I thank the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as the Executive Director of UNICEF, for their current report (S/2018/465), which informs us of the grave violations committed against children in armed conflict and reminds us that preventing such violations is a collective responsibility of the international community and the primary concern of Member States. We take note of the recommendations, and, in that regard, I reiterate Kenya's commitment to continue supporting their implementation aimed at strengthening the protection of children in armed conflict.

To effectively protect the rights of the child and prevent conflicts, we need to address the triggers of conflict and civil strife, which include poverty, disenfranchisement and exclusion. Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals, each of which is important and relevant to the protection and empowerment of children. For Kenya, His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta has prioritized the attainment of food security, nutrition, universal health care, affordable housing and manufacturing as immediate and critical to ending poverty, access to quality health care, education and the creation of youth employment.

We can prevent and end many of those conflicts in our lifetime by implementing the conventions and agreements to which we have already subscribed. Those agreements must be accompanied by the sustained and flexible funding and development of national action plans with clear road maps for the acceleration, empowerment, protection and equal opportunities of children. Child protection therefore should be part and parcel of any comprehensive conflict-management and -prevention policy. We are encouraged by the cases of released child soldiers from armed groups who have consequently been rehabilitated and reintegrated into society by Member States and United Nations agencies, particularly UNICEF. We should ensure that sustained psychological and educational reintegration help break the cycle of violence and promote sustained peace.

In conclusion, Kenya remains committed to supporting regional and international efforts aimed at ending conflicts and finding sustainable peace, especially in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Hamadi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on presiding over the Security Council, and thank you for convening this important meeting.

I also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her comprehensive briefing and continuous efforts to highlight the situation of children in armed conflict and provide them with effective protection by preparing inclusive, independent and unbiased reports. I would like also to thank Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Yenny Londoño, civil society representative, for contributing to this important debate.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends for Children and Armed Conflict.

The statistics in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) are causes of grief and concern. They indicate a significant increase in the number of violations against children in armed conflict in 2017, despite the important progress made, as set out in the report, in strengthening protection for children as Governments and armed groups cooperated to prevent those violations. In that regard, we are truly alarmed by the ongoing violations against children in many areas around the world, as noted by the Secretary-General in his report. Consequently, the protection of children and their rights is especially important, and we must pay special attention to that matter, particularly when it comes to incidents that are considered by the Security Council, in our region and beyond.

The international community has a collective responsibility to redouble its efforts and take additional decisive measures to address the issue as an integral part of any comprehensive strategy to prevent and resolve conflicts and establish a sustainable peace that ensures that children are not deprived of the protection that is provided for them by their families, communities and the law. In that regard, we welcome the manual on integrating the protection of children into peace processes.

We are pleased to announce that the State of Qatar will participate in organizing the first international conference on the participation of youth in peace processes, in partnership with Finland and Columbia and in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, to be held in Helsinki in December 2018.

The State of Qatar strongly believes that children and youth hold the keys to peace and security. They are our hope for the future. We believe in the importance of investing in developing, protecting and educating those two categories, especially children. We are convinced that the right to education shall not cease to exist due to armed conflict. The State of Qatar has therefore paid special attention to providing education to children in emergency situations, especially in armed conflict.

We have established the Education Above All Foundation and launched other initiatives and education programmes that are being implemented and funded by the State, in cooperation with international organizations. Allow me to highlight the significant achievement made by the Education Above All Foundation, in partnership with UNICEF and over 80 global partners. We have provided quality education to 10 million children deprived of school in over 50 countries around the world, including countries suffering from armed conflict. That was made public by Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, the head of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, during an event held in New York last April.

The State of Qatar is committed to protecting education in emergency situations. We were among the first countries to join the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration. We also understand the close link between protecting the rights of children and youth and their empowerment, on the one hand, and preventing conflicts, on the other. Therefore, we have paid close attention to creating job opportunities for youth through policy development and relief programmes that are implemented by the State at the national, regional and international levels. In September 2017, the State of Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and Silateck, a Qatari foundation, to enhance the employability of the youth and build their capacity, as well as launch projects to protect them from violent extremism.

In conclusion, we welcome resolution 2427 (2018), adopted by the Council this morning. The State of Qatar co-sponsored the resolution because it reflects the principles of protecting children in armed conflict. The resolution is in line with our priorities in that regard. We emphasize that we will also support international efforts to achieve the goal of protecting children. We will do our best to fulfil that goal under any circumstance and by any means, and to create an appropriate environment so that they can grow up in safe and healthy conditions under which they can develop their potential and make a peaceful, safe and prosperous future for all the peoples of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Dobhany (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like, at the outset, to congratulate Sweden for presiding over the Security Council for this month. We wish you, Mr. President, success as you manage the work of the Council, and thank you for holding this open debate on children and armed conflict on the theme "Protecting children today prevents conflict tomorrow". The presence of His Excellency the Prime Minister of Sweden shows the special attention Sweden accords to the protection of children in particular, and the protection of human rights in general. I also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and her Office for their efforts to protect children in armed conflict.

The topic is a priority for the Government of my country, as we suffer from a conflict caused by the Houthi militias that carried out a coup. We are shouldering the responsibility of protecting our children to spare them the impact of that armed conflict.

The delegation of my country associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Argentina on behalf of countries that have joined the Safe Schools Declaration.

The Houthi rebel militias drove over 2 million children to look for work as a result of waging a barbaric war. They recruit children and lure them with money by exploiting the deteriorating situation of Yemeni families, paying them for fighting in their ranks. They are even recruiting children from orphanages and youth shelters, including over 23,000 children of whom 2,500 children were recruited since the beginning of 2018, in contravention of international agreements and the law on protecting children.

Those militias have denied over 4 million children their right to education, including 1.8 million who were denied the right to enrol in schools for the past two years. They have bombed and destroyed 2,372 schools, either completely or partially. They have used over 1,500 schools as prisons and military barracks. The children of Yemen are being subjected to the worst forms of killing, suffering and recruitment. They are denied the right to education and health as well as their social rights. The Houthi militias are responsible for all of that, which shows how heinous they are, while disregarding the rights of children and international laws that stipulate their protection.

The Government of the Republic of Yemen is fully committed to the protection of children and ensuring that they are not recruited into armed conflicts. We have shown that in deeds, and not only in words, whereby the Government took the following measures.

In November 2012, His Excellency President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi issued a presidential decree that prevented recruiting children under the age of 18 into the army or security forces, and stated that the recruitment of children is illegal. In May 2014, an action plan was signed between the Yemeni Government and UNICEF to put an end to the recruitment of children into armed forces. We have reached an agreement with the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to create a system to register newborns and deaths in order to be able to determine the age of those who are joining military service. We are considering establishing a unit in the Yemeni army that deals with protecting children and trains forces of the army to protect them.

The Republic of Yemen is committed to protecting children and making sure they are spared the hell of war. Consequently, last year we joined the Safe Schools Declaration, which aims to protect children and their schools in times of conflict. We also issued a military order on 18 March 2018, signed by the Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, stressing the commitment of the Yemeni armed forces to their rules and regulations, which are in conformity with international law criminalizing child recruitment. Furthermore, the order stressed the importance of committing to the protocol on surrendering children detained during armed operations to civil child protection authorities. No photos or video footages should be taken of recruited children who have been arrested, and all media content of this sort should be deleted.

Last week, the Minister for Foreign Affairs sent a letter to Ms. Gamba to initiate the discussion between representatives of the Yemeni Government and United Nations officials with a view to updating the 2014 action plan to prohibit the recruitment of children. The Government repeatedly called on competent United Nations organizations to assist the Government in implementing the plan, including in areas under the control of Houthi militias. Those militias have immensely exploited and recruited children, as is shown in the figures contained in the reports of the Secretary-General of 2015, 2016 and 2017

With regard to the report of the Secretary-General for 2017 (S/2018/465), allow me to make the following observations.

The Yemeni Government agrees with the Secretary-General that it is critical to prevent violations against children affected by armed conflict. That should be a primary concern of the international community. We must do more to address that challenge by ensuring that the protection of children is an integral part of any comprehensive strategy to prevent and resolve conflicts in order to achieve lasting peace. The Yemeni Government stresses its legal and moral obligation to protect the lives and future of all Yemenis without exception. We are dedicated to protecting the present and the future of Yemeni children. After all, they are our future and the pillar of sustainable peace.

We appreciate the praise of the Secretary-General for the efforts undertaken by the Government of Yemen to improve the protection of children over the past year. The Government of Yemen has been removed from the list of parties that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to that end. However, we are very surprised to see that the legitimate Government of Yemen and its agencies are compared to the armed militias. The legitimate Government is seeking to protect its people and is not recruiting children. It cooperates with the United Nations. It complies with international law. It is implementing Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2216 (2015), as demonstrated in the progress highlighted in the report.

The United Nations continues to rely on civil organizations and individuals who are affiliated with the Houthi militias as sources. Those sources are misleading and seek by all ways and means to change the current political crisis into a humanitarian one and to falsify the figures and the reality on the ground in order to place the blame on the Arab coalition and the Yemeni Government for everything that is happening in Yemen. The United Nations is relying on records from the Ministry of Health and Hospitals, controlled by Houthi militias, as sources. The Houthi militias are falsifying those records and providing the United Nations with false figures in order to achieve their political goals. We have already rejected the monitoring mechanism and called for greater transparency, and we have stated that we are prepared to work with the Office of Ms. Gamba to uncover the truth.

International organizations are underrepresented in liberated areas. They do not have enough offices there so they rely on unreliable sources and the United Nations continues to ignore the requests of the legitimate Government in that regard. We underscore that there are no children in the Yemeni armed forces and that we are fully prepared to receive a commission of inquiry from the Office of Ms. Gamba on the allegations contained in the report concerning the national army of the Republic of Yemen.

We are working to update and implement the action plan signed in 2014. We look forward to Ms. Gamba's visit to Yemen, especially to the governorates of Aden and Ma'rib, in order to assess the situation there and the efforts undertaken by the centre for the rehabilitation of child soldiers in Ma'rib. We also call on the Office of Ms. Gamba to provide assistance so that we can enhance the birth and death registration system in order to provide better protection for children in the future.

In conclusion, we hope that the progress made and the commitment of the Yemeni Government to protect children will lead to the delisting of the Yemeni armed forces from the report's annex and also the delisting of the Arab coalition. We welcome the cooperation with the Office of Ms. Gamba. We fully agree with her that we need preventive working methods to protect children and that we must stay clear of any propaganda that does not promote cooperation, but rather widens the gap between the United Nations and its Member States.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): Armenia would like to thank the Swedish presidency for organizing the open debate on children and armed conflict. We appreciate the high importance that Sweden attaches to the issue, as was exemplified by His Excellency the Prime Minister in presiding over the Council earlier today. We also thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba; the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, and the civil society representative, Ms. Yenny Londoño, for their insightful briefings.

We welcome and support the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which was drafted by Sweden, aimed at further enhancing the protection children from violence.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465) highlights an alarming increase in the number of violations. The report is a stark reminder of the gravity of the situation faced by children in many conflict areas. There is a pressing need to scale up collective efforts to ensure that all children, whether in situations of armed conflict or in peace, live free of violence, exploitation and coercion.

The mandate of the Special Representative plays an important role in helping prevent grave violations and identifying the key challenges and complexities in implementing effective protection mechanisms on the ground. In that context, we welcome the efforts of the Special Representative to establish capacity for enhanced synergies among United Nations agencies, international, regional and subregional organizations, and local non-governmental entities.

Armenia continues to prioritize the protection of children's rights, in accordance with our national policies and the frameworks of international cooperation we has embraced. Armenia's commitment to promoting the safety of children in armed conflict is also reflected in our endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments, as well as the Vancouver Principles. Armenia is also a signatory to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and we encourage Member States who have not yet done so to join those important instruments.

Today's open debate once again reminds us about the tragic impact of conflicts on children living in affected areas and the daily risks they face. We strongly condemn violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including and in particular when they concern the rights and the lives of children.

Effective protection of children in situations of armed conflicts requires a strengthened commitment to the implementation of relevant international instruments. As a consistent supporter and promoter of the concept and practice of prevention, Armenia prioritizes the focus on the early action. Supporting impartiality and independence in humanitarian action and providing unimpeded humanitarian access is crucial to preventing and alleviating the sufferings of children caught in conflict.

In our region, as a result of the aggression of Azerbaijan against the people of Nagorno Karabakh, we have been observing deliberate, indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations and infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, in which civilians and schoolchildren were killed and injured. Placing military installations in civilian settlements and using them as launch pads for shelling along the borders is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

The reports of instances of appalling violations against children are deeply alarming. No less disturbing, however, are certain practices, whereby children — vulnerable as they are — are deliberately exposed to hate propaganda, which fuels ethnic hatred and incites violence and intolerance. Such practices are incompatible with norms and principles of international human rights and humanitarian law and must be identified, condemned and eradicated on every level, without reservation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to sincerely thank Sweden for organizing this debate on the issue of children. The debate takes place within the context of the principles and commitments adopted during the international conference in Paris in February 2007 and will enable us to pursue international mobilization in order to protect and prevent children from being illegally recruited and sent to battle, and will renew our determination to take action to ensure a better life for children worldwide.

In today's conflicts, children are unfortunately the primary victims. They are victims when they are directly affected or separated from their loved ones; when their education is in jeopardy or they are recruited into armed forces as combatants; when they are abducted from schools, on the street or from their homes; when they are forced into slavery or sexually exploited. The whole world watches in anger and outrage as children are abducted in waves as a systematic tactic of war to terrorize, subject and humiliate entire communities. Children kidnapped during conflicts are thrown into violence and horror. Their abduction is often a precursor to more intense violence used against them. They are separated from their loved ones, robbed of their childhood and often treated in the most savage way. Many are used as combatants, sexual slaves, spies, traffickers, transporters of ammunition. Some are drugged before being sent to battle, on suicide missions or forced to commit atrocities against their own communities.

While today's debate has mobilized all stakeholders in the international community, we must recognize that the efforts made thus far to put an end to violence against children and prevent their participation or their use in armed conflicts, are insufficient. The efforts of the international community would benefit from a multifaceted and strategic approach that not only addresses ongoing conflicts but also focuses on prevention. Moreover, we need a pragmatic approach that combines both incentives and more restrictive measures, particularly in terms of accountability and the fight against impunity.

Like today's debate, calls to action are undoubtedly useful as key tools to monitor the situation and to share information and reports. They are essential measures to prevent and eliminate the recruitment of children in times of conflict. In that context, many concrete actions will have to be envisaged in the framework of our collective action.

First, we must advocate a two-fold preventive approach aimed initially at preventing conflicts and, when they do occur, at limiting their effects on children.

Second, we must prevent conflict by strengthening democracy, good governance, sustainable development and respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Third, we must take legal, political and institutional measures to prevent and eliminate violence against children.

Fourth, Governments should ratify and implement relevant international treaties and incorporate them into national legislation. They must endorse the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups.

Fifth, children's programmes should pay special attention to those at greatest risk of being recruited into the armed forces, particularly children separated from their families or without families.

Sixth, effective age-determination mechanisms must be put in place to prevent the recruitment of minors. That requires keeping rigorous birth records — an essential condition to eliminating the phenomenon of child soldiers or locating their parents for reunification.

Seventh, we must guarantee access to education for children as a special protective measure to prevent their recruitment, especially for children living in refugee camps or internally displaced children.

Eight, parties to conflicts must reach written agreements in which they commit to respect a minimum age for recruitment into armed forces.

Ninth, the fight against impunity plays a key role in the pursuit of child protection. Parties who recruit children under the legal age must be prosecuted. Crimes against children in armed conflicts should be considered crimes against humanity because children are the future of their respective nations and the future of humankind.

Morocco has consistently engaged in international efforts to end the participation of children in armed conflicts and has acceded to all international instruments relating to the rights of the child. It was among the first countries to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Paris Commitments.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mrs. Theofili (Greece): Allow me to commend the Swedish presidency for organizing today's debate, as well as for its excellent work so far on this sensitive issue. I also wish to congratulate all Council members on the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018).

Greece fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and wishes to add some further remarks.

The protection of children affected by armed conflict and the safeguarding of their rights constitutes a priority for Greece. In this vein, my country has already ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Moreover, Greece has also endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration.

At the national level, Greece is in the process of drafting a special national action plan dedicated to the rights of the child — a joint and inclusive endeavour involving the participation of all relevant stakeholders. The action plan will focus, inter alia, on the protection of unaccompanied children.

Undoubtedly, Greece considers the protection of the rights of conflict-affected children who seek asylum within its national territory, whether unaccompanied or not, as a matter of utmost priority. Special protection is provided to foreign minors by the code for migration and social integration. In order to provide effective and adequate protection for all refugee and asylum-seeking children, the competent national authorities are cooperating closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as civil society organizations.

Additionally, in the field of education, a special office for refugee education has been set up to deal with refugee education issues aiming at ensuring the integration of refugee children in the Greek educational system by providing psychosocial support following a preparatory, transitional period. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has been implementing an emergency action plan for the education of all refugee and migrant children, regardless of their status. Moreover, in the field of public health, the national action plan on gender equality sets as a strategic goal the promotion of physical and mental health of all members of special population groups, including refugee girls.

Focusing on the protection of the rights of conflict-affected children by taking targeted action through strategic partnerships remains a high priority for all stakeholders, the international community, States and civil society organizations. Such inclusive, coordinated action at the international, regional, national and local levels should include all stages of armed conflict in order to achieve sustainable peace in a more effective way. After all, by safeguarding the rights of children in the present we invest in shaping the peaceful and democratic citizens of the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, as well as the Swedish presidency of the Security Council, for having convened this important meeting on an issue that we deem of great interest and high priority. My thanks also go to Ms. Virginia Gamba for her valuable briefing on the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465), as well as to Ms. Henrietta Fore and Ms. Yenny Londoño for their briefings.

More than 245 million children are living in conflict-affected areas throughout the world. This year's report records the highest percentage of violations of children's rights since Graça Machel's famous study (see A/51/306). Egypt calls on the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to pursue its positive approach, aimed at ensuring that these reports are not merely a tool for pointing fingers at one party or another but can truly sound a warning to the international community about the threat posed by such violations and promote the identification of solutions to protect children in armed conflict areas.

We support her mandate, which will be consolidated by means of resolution 2427 (2018), which we have just adopted and which Egypt co-sponsored. The resolution will complement the legal and institutional framework of the mandate, and we trust that this will have positive repercussions for children in areas of conflict next year. Against this backdrop, we wish to emphasize the following points.

First, we reiterate that the primary responsibility for protecting civilians, particularly children, in armed conflict lies with the Governments concerned.

Second, we will not be able to prevent conflicts, as resolution 2427 (2018) states, unless we attack the deep-rooted causes of their outbreak, which include obstacles to sustainable development and the combating against poverty. We must link conflict prevention with cooperation with States so as to build their capacity.

Third, although we support the most recent developments in terms of the way in which the report of the Secretary-General is drafted, we believe that no double standards should be used. The report refers to positive aspects regarding children in situations of conflict worldwide, with one exception: the children in the Palestinian territories, whose suffering continues as a result of killings, detention and the bombing of schools under the yoke of Israeli occupation. We wish to know why the perpetrators of those violations were not included in the annex to the report. We echo the Secretary-General in calling on the Israeli Government to respect international principles relating to justice for minors; to reconsider its use of administrative detention for children and of solitary confinement for them as a punitive measure; and to discourage the use of children as spies. We call on the Secretary-General to continue, in his next report, to follow up on such violations and to include their perpetrators on the list annexed to the report, not to point fingers to one party or another but to identify solutions that will ensure the protection of Palestinian children in the occupied territories.

Fourth, the lack of funding for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for children remains a major obstacle in their protection. We therefore support the appeal made in the resolution adopted today to the international community, particularly the donor community, to increase its contribution to such programmes.

Fifth, Egypt has ratified the 2007 Optional Protocol on prohibiting child recruitment, and amended its Constitution to comply therewith. We pay particular attention to child education and health and to support their families, with the new strategy for children 2015-2020. We are also taking special measures to help refugee or displaced children who have left conflict zones and are currently on Egyptian territory so that we can ensure them the same levels of health and education services as their Egyptian counterparts.

Sixth, Egypt pays tribute to the regional and sub-regional dimensions reflected in the new resolution on children and armed conflict, especially since the exploitation of children can be a cross-border issue. This drew the attention of Egyptian research centres, which have done many studies on unaccompanied children moving across borders to flee conflicts. They are easy prey for human traffickers and armed terrorist groups. We are willing here to make available all of the services of the Cairo International Centre to provide training on conflict resolution and the maintenance of peace at the regional and sub-regional levels and to provide greater protection for children.

Seventh, we cannot eliminate violations against children's rights in conflict areas without a comprehensive implementation of transitional justice systems or bringing perpetrators to justice.

Eighth, the Peacebuilding Commission plays a key role in highlighting the issue of the protection of children in peacebuilding efforts in the aftermath of conflict. We support the call made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to include specialized child advisers in the various peacekeeping missions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mrs. Rugwabiza (Rwanda): Through you, Madam President, I should like very sincerely to thank Sweden for having convened this very timely and salient debate. The personal participation of His Excellency your Prime Minister in the debate on this issue places this issue at the highest political level, which is the level at which we need to place such an important matter. We are also very happy to see that a number of very high-level officials were here this morning. We were here this morning — not among the high officials — and were very happy to see that the issue is being put at the highest political level. This does not come as a surprise to us; we still recall vividly Sweden's first presidency of the Security Council, which put prevention of conflict at the heart of its work; that was the very first time our Secretary-General participated in the work of the Security Council. So it is only fitting that today we are moving one step forward by putting a focus on children.

Rwanda welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) and is very pleased to be one of the sponsors of this important resolution, which bolsters the mechanisms to prevent violations against children in conflict situations.

I should like also at this point to thank very much this morning's briefers, in particular the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Gamba, as well as the survivor — I will call her a survivor — Ms. Londoño, who really shared with us her testimony this morning.

The impact of armed conflicts on children is catastrophic; we cannot overemphasize this. They have serious consequences for children's development, both in terms of physical scars and of the invisible ones that can be perceived only in children's learning and their emotional and social development.

Nearly 250 million children live in countries affected by violent conflicts. In the relatively recent past, Rwanda was a country in conflict, and the perspective I would like to offer the Council today is based on the fact that when we were in conflict and experiencing the genocide of 24 years ago, children were not spared on the sides of either the killers or the victims. If it is any inspiration, what I can say is that a large part of what we are still dealing with today is related to the trauma experienced by today's young adults, who were children then. The consequences are far-reaching and last a very long time. Simply based on our experience, therefore, I can say that it is not only absolutely essential to protect children today in order to enable a country's rapid and inclusive development, but also to enable it to be resilient and get back on its feet as soon as possible. That is what we can share from our own experience.

My delegation is very concerned about the increase today in the documented cases of verified violations of children by both Government forces and non-State armed groups in conflict. What is even more worrying is that those are just the documented cases, and the extent of the undocumented cases is essentially unknown to any of us. Our efforts to ensure that the international community provides the tools necessary to address violations with the greatest possible focus, break the cycles of violence and address the root causes of armed conflict, while preventing new armed conflicts from breaking out, should be our collective focus.

Even if it is stating the obvious, the rights of children must be respected and protected, regardless of the context or circumstances, and even when they are in very poor, vulnerable or disadvantaged conditions. The fact is that the only side that children belong on in any armed conflict is the side of the victims. Whether they are combatants or direct victims of a conflict, they are still victims. We would like to propose some recommendations by Rwanda. Many of those here will already have heard many of them today.

First of all, we really have to focus on prevention, with preventive tools and strategies for protecting children at risk of being affected by armed conflict. Secondly, we must put in place the means for strengthening accountability. Thirdly, we need to ensure that the protection of children is included as a separate part of every peace process and negotiations on peace agreements. And fourthly, we must support Member States and the various parties to a conflict by providing them with the tools to help them protect children. Lastly, we must ensure that our reintegration efforts are very specific — specific to girls, for example, and to children in particular circumstances.

Rwanda believes that it is crucial to strengthen the links between the protection of children, the rights of the child and conflict prevention. The importance of access to education and health care cannot be overemphasized. I would like to echo the brilliant words of the Prime Minister of Sweden this morning when he said that this is simple. It is about providing security, safety, health care, education and food — just putting food on the table. It is as simple as that. This is not about a very sophisticated mechanism. More importantly, those are our obligations. They are not optional. We may have optional protocols, but our obligations to our children are not optional. We urge the members of the Security Council to consider consulting with child protection experts in order to ensure that adequate capacity is provided in order to meet the mandates of peace operations with regard to children and their needs.

I should not conclude without recalling Ms. Londoño's powerful remarks this morning, which showed that all children, including former combatants, have the power to become agents of change if they are just given the chance and a platform. Children are more resilient and more likely to become positive agents for change if we give them that chance and platform. The case of Ms. Londoño speaks for itself.

Today the importance of collecting best practices has also been mentioned, and I would like to share with the Council one that we in Rwanda provide today and the platform that we use. Every year in Rwanda we hold a Children's Summit, organized by children and held in our national Parliament. All the recommendations that emerge from the summit integrate the children's needs, priorities and demands. As a Government, we are accountable for following up and implementing those recommendations. If that might be of use for others' consideration, I would be happy to elaborate further on our annual Children's Summit.

Lastly, I would again like to echo something discussed by many speakers today, which is that if we do not protect and provide children living in conflict situations with what they need, we will have to deal with the adults that they will become on the battlefield. To cite the words of one of our colleagues this morning, the representative of the United States, if we do not deal with those children, we will have to deal with the adults that they will become.

I would like to conclude by reiterating Rwanda's commitment to ensuring that the rights of all children are respected and protected, regardless of the context or circumstance. Rwanda is a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Dominican Republic.

Ms. Andújar (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Dominican Republic associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the countries endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration.

We would like to congratulate Sweden on its assumption of the presidency of the Council and for organizing today's open debate on children in armed conflict, with the theme of "Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow".

Our thanks also go to Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict, and to Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, for sharing with us their important perspectives. Likewise, we thank Ms. Yenny Londoño, representative of civil society, whose experience reminds us of our responsibility and the urgency with which we must act.

We are concerned about the high levels of violations against children affected by conflict, about armed groups recruiting children to serve as suicide terrorists and about alarming rates of kidnapping of and sexual violence against children. Children continue to be stigmatized for having been recruited and used by armed groups, and they are criminalized for acts they were forced to commit. That results in a traumatized generation whose childhood has been cut short and whose future is in jeopardy. It is essential to ensure justice, protection and full enjoyment of human rights, putting greater focus on the most vulnerable children — those in armed conflict — as a means to prevent conflict and build peace.

Schools, students and teachers are deliberately targeted in attacks, demonstrating that this is not only a crisis of security but also of human rights and social development. Children's education is always one of the first casualties during conflict and too often the last to be recovered. Due to the seriousness of the situation, the Dominican Republic has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and we encourage other States to endorse those non-legally binding documents. Furthermore, in 2014 the Dominican Republic ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and we call for its universal ratification.

It is imperative to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law, which provides the basis for legally binding obligations for all the parties in conflicts, in addition to continuing to adopt measures and taking on greater commitments, principally with the action plans, to protect children from conflict and contribute to more effective conflict prevention. We therefore take this opportunity to call for an end to impunity for those who perpetrate violations of the rights of children in conflict.

The protection, reintegration and support of children who have been recruited by armed groups — including through greater investment in programs for education, training, counselling and family reunification — is key in breaking the cycle of violence and directing us towards the goal that unites us today in this debate.

We believe that it is vital to guarantee the active and meaningful participation of children and young people in the processes of building and maintaining peace and security. Furthermore, we recognize the fundamental role played by United Nations agencies and by regional and subregional organizations in addressing the consequences suffered by children in armed conflicts. We believe that this problem must continue to be part of the policies and programmes of peacekeeping missions in the field.

We still have a way to go in eliminating the abuse and horrors that children in conflict face. We therefore reiterate our commitment to continue collaborating with the United Nations, Member States and civil society while we occupy our seat in the Security Council as a non-permanent member beginning in 2019, giving this agenda and our children the level of priority that they deserve.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): My delegation thanks you, Madam President, for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict; welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) and thanks the other speakers and contributors for their valuable insights.

We have joined other members in support of strengthening the children and armed conflict agenda through co-sponsoring resolution 2427 (2018), because

Liberia believes in the connection between conflict prevention and the protection of children.

Earlier this morning, at the opening of a high-level political forum on sustainable development at the Economic and Social Council, Professor Jeffrey Sachs rightly reminded us that the children are our future — there can be no future without them. And yet, as we debate today, the uncomfortable truth about our future looms over this Chamber: children are still being used as weapons and soldiers of wars. Their future — our future — is being blighted. The innocence of their childhood is being stolen and the process of their growth is perhaps forever violated. We agree with the Secretary-General that this is unacceptable. We acknowledge the reported progress in a number of countries, but the general trend continues to pose a threat to our collective future. Too many of the world's children, by no fault of their own, are being left too far behind.

Twenty years ago, the report prepared by Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children concluded that "the most effective way to protect children is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts" (*A/51/306, para. 253*). This conclusion is as true today as it was then. As we work to promote the new paradigm of preventing conflict and sustaining peace, it is also imperative that the Security Council and all Member States commit to working creatively, selflessly and aggressively to ensure the protection of children suffering as a result of current armed conflicts. They are, in truth, innocent victims of our inability to act.

What is also true is that the most vulnerable to conscription are poor children, especially those who have little or no access to education, as they have a greater chance of being conscripted for service in armed forces. Hence it is important to elevate the interlinks between child protection, the rights of the child and conflict prevention in our national action plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

When we claim protection for the rights of children, we must do so with the provision of conducive environments to learn and grow. Important as they are, conducive environments are more than school buildings, desks and chairs. They are also about the families and societies in which they live. Do they possess the means and systems to live in peace with each other, sustainably? We have repeatedly seen that where they do not, school buildings, rather than being centres for moulding minds, are converted into military barracks, dedicated to fashioning our children into instruments of war.

Liberia welcomes and supports the children and armed conflict agenda, not only as a tool to ensure that children are protected and perpetrators held accountable, but also as a moral imperative — as if we needed one — to act with singularity of purpose and unwavering determination, including here in this Chamber, to decidedly end the ongoing conflicts. It is all too obvious: where conflict exists, poor children and their families will remain at high risk of having their lives — and our future — ruined, perhaps forever. It is also true that we must act with equal commitment and decisiveness to prevent conflict and sustain peace.

Accordingly, where State institutions have clearly collapsed under the weight of ongoing armed conflict, perhaps it is time to extend the duty to protect and the duty to actually end ongoing conflicts to the regions where conflicts are taking place, as well as to other, external actors who have vested interests in the continuation of the conflicts. It is time we truly held each other duly accountable for ending conflicts as well as preventing them.

Liberia knows a thing or two about child soldiers. We commend the work of Special Representative Gamba and UNICEF in this regard, as well as the work of many local local actors, including non-governmental organizations and faith-based groups. Despite having little or no means, they gave willingly of themselves and their organizations to advance, in whatever way they could, not only the process of reintegration but also disarmament and demobilization.

However, it is also true that these institutions — both local and international — lack the necessary funding and donor support for the proper reintegration of children recruited as soldiers, many of whom have been exposed to the worst forms of inhumanity and drugs. And yet, rather than being treated as victims, they are treated as drags on the society, ostracized and vilified, sometimes by their own families and certainly by their communities.

Even as we have urged them to move along in their own development, in the case of the few who make it through the reintegration programme — which in Liberia consists of three months of skills training and three years of formal education, regardless of the child's starting level — there is no post-process follow up. If we talk about pulling yourself up by the bootstraps — these children, deprived of their innocence and having their mentality defiled, they have no boots, let alone straps.

Although the reintegration process is essential, it is the least supported of efforts to return countries to peace, despite the fact that — again, in the case of Liberia — there is an overwhelming eagerness among child soldiers to be disarmed. Therefore, a sizeable element of a post-conflict country's future — its energetic youth — lies in waste in the streets of cities, destined for a life of drugs and crime and doomed to a fate via a path they did not help to create and as such await the next opportunity to become killing machines. Having spent the formative years of their lives living by the gun and in disregard of democratic rules and norms of society, many of these child combatants are ignorant of the experience and values of living under peaceful conditions. We throw them a bucket, a cutlass and maybe $75 and ask them to reintegrate. We ask them to forget their past — the only thing they really know.

Of course we can do better than this; we can support sustained reintegration processes because these stand among the best guarantees to prevent conflict and sustain peace. We may not be able to change what happened to our children in the past, but we can more meaningfully affect what could happen for them in the future — our future.

As I conclude, permit me to emphasize that, while reintegration is a good process to help former child soldiers regain a sense of normality, our primary objective should first focus on innovative ways to mitigate the recruitment of children in armed conflicts. This should be our social and moral responsibility. We cannot afford to castigate or isolate them. They are not to be blamed for their circumstances; they must be seen as innocent victims standing in need of our support.

UNICEF should be applauded for its initiatives, in close collaboration with Governments and communities, to protect and rehabilitate children affected by armed conflict. We should endeavour to ensure that the conventions and treaties governing children's rights are fully upheld and implemented.

Finally, there are no short cuts to rehabilitation and reintegration, nor can we afford to invent any. Rehabilitation and reintegration require long-term strategies. They require resources that the most affected and needful countries sadly do not have and cannot afford to be without in consolidating the foundations of and sustaining their peace. For post-conflict countries, rehabilitation and reintegration are an important way to sustain peace and avoid the slippery slope back into conflict. When we give each other a chance to be better, and when we give children a better chance at a better life, we do not necessarily help the other person — we actually help ourselves.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for the report before us (S/2018/465). I would also like to thank the Swedish presidency for convening such a timely debate and initiating resolution 2427 (2018) on the protection of children in conflict zones, which was adopted today. We are honoured to be a co-sponsor of this important resolution.

The ever-changing nature of armed conflicts in today's increasingly complex world poses a serious challenge to the international community in protecting the most defenceless civilian victims — children. As the future of every society, children need to be protected, nourished, educated and assured of their fundamental rights. However, today nearly 250 million children are affected by armed conflicts globally. The impact of terrorism and violent extremism on children is devastating. It robs them of their childhood and such basic rights as good health and education, and inflicts lasting trauma that hinders their psychological development. Above all, it undermines their ability to lead peaceful and dignified lives and the chance to prosper and realize their aspirations.

Afghanistan has faced externally imposed conflict for four decades and our people, including our innocent children, have suffered tremendously from the resulting violence over this period of time. Tragically, in the context of our security challenge, children are among the scores of innocent victims whose precious lives are taken away by terrorist and extremist groups imposed on us from abroad to prevent our stability and development. As a result of this, in the past year alone 3,179 children have been reported killed or maimed in Afghanistan.

Moreover, in what amounts to one of the gravest forms of abuse and violation, children have been recruited and brainwashed in religious schools in our region to carry out suicide attacks in their teenage or adult lives. This must be addressed on an urgent basis. The Afghan Government stands firm in its strong commitment to safeguarding and advancing the rights of all children. To that end, we have taken tangible measures, such as the enactment of national legislation by which we are implementing commitments under various international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Government is also implementing various measures and programmes, in line with our national and international commitments, aimed at protecting our children from the horrific effects of armed conflict.

Furthermore, we are dedicated to strengthening our concerted efforts with the international community to further the implementation of the joint action plan, a comprehensive framework aimed at ensuring the physical and psychological well-being of Afghan children.

In the past year alone, through the joint action plan we have taken great strides towards preventing the recruitment of child soldiers and speedily reintegrating delinquent juveniles into Afghan society through vocational training programmes. To preserve these gains, we will continue to enforce the new penal code that criminalizes the sexual abuse of children, regulate juvenile rehabilitation centres, expand the presence of child protection units in the Afghan National Police recruitment centres, and continue our campaign to promote children's rights within the Afghan National Police. We have had high-level meetings with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and other partners, which have led to increased coordination of our joint efforts to ensure safe, dignified and prosperous lives for Afghan children.

For Afghanistan, the protection of children and the advancement of their rights remain a central focus in the work of the National Unity Government. We are working to build on and consolidate recent progress in the knowledge that children will provide a stable and prosperous future for our country. We believe that the rights of children can best be protected and promoted in an atmosphere of peace.

To meet this end, we have taken new measures aimed at achieving a lasting settlement to the current conflict imposed on our country. The three-day ceasefire with the Taliban enforced last month offered a glimmer of hope that peace is possible. We are working with regional and international partners for a successful outcome to our peace efforts and hope that the coming months will witness more tangible progress on this front. It is our sincere hope that, this time around, we can achieve a sustainable peace for our future generations and create a society where our children can live in peace, free of fear and violence.

In conclusion, Afghanistan reiterates its firm commitment to ensuring the full protection and well-being of all children worldwide. It is only through our shared values and objectives that we can alleviate the suffering of children and build sustainable, peaceful societies. Let us strive to collectively achieve more tangible progress on this moral imperative.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Mikayilli (Azerbaijan): We would like to thank the Swedish presidency for convening this open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2018/465), as well as Ms. Virginia Gamba and the other briefers for their valuable contributions.

Azerbaijan reiterates its strong support for the children and armed conflict agenda and views the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) as the Council's continued commitment to the cause of protecting children.

As the Secretary-General's report states, in 2017 there was a large increase in the number of violations compared with the number reported for 2016. We are deeply alarmed by the extent and gravity of the violations committed against children in armed conflict, particularly killing and maiming, recruitment, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals. The prevailing disrespect for international humanitarian law, increasing involvement of non-State armed groups and the rise of violent extremism bring more misery to children. The use of the internet and social media to recruit children is highly disturbing.

We strongly condemn all violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. All parties should comply with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect children. Resolute steps should be taken to address accountability and put an end to impunity for such violations. Since this problem is multidimensional, greater emphasis should also be placed on the rehabilitation and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups. We share the Secretary-General's assessment that predictable and sustained funding for the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict is essential to put in place viable alternatives to military life and prevent their re-recruitment.

As the groundbreaking report of Graça Machel underlined, "the most effective way to protect children is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts" (*A/51/306, para. 253*). The international community should therefore redouble its efforts in relation to conflict prevention and conflict resolution to save children from the horrors of war.

Regrettably, Azerbaijan is no stranger to this problem, owing to the continued aggression by Armenia. Azerbaijan continues to suffer from having one of the highest numbers of refugees and displaced persons in the world, many of whom are children. Despite the formal ceasefire, direct and deliberate attacks by the armed forces of Armenia against civilians and civilian objects in Azerbaijan continue. The assessment report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, following its mission to the affected areas of Azerbaijan in May 2016, made it abundantly clear that, due to the use of new and heavier types of military hardware and intense fighting during the escalation in April 2016, many schools were damaged and closed in the areas near the front line in several districts of Azerbaijan.

To conclude, although the vast majority of atrocities against children worldwide are attributed to non-State armed groups, the wrongs of the recent past and the targeting of civilians in ongoing inter-State conflicts must not be neglected. Therefore, we once again reiterate our call on the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to pay attention to the plight of children in all situations of armed conflict.

We also call on the Special Representative to give due attention to the protection of internally displaced children in her work, as internally displaced persons represent two-thirds of those displaced worldwide. Furthermore, in line with the provisions of the very important resolution on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts, adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women in March, we invite the Special Representative to address this complex issue as well.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Haiti.

Mr. Regis (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): It is my honour, on behalf of the Haitian delegation, to congratulate the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations on having undertaken the initiative to convene this very timely open debate on strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

More than 20 years ago, Graça Machel denounced in her famous report (see A/51/306) the "moral vacuum", a space devoid of the most basic human values in which children are slaughtered, raped and maimed, exploited as soldiers, starved and exposed to extreme brutality as a result of the deliberate and conscious decisions of adults. Here in this Chamber last year, the Secretary-General of the United Nations strongly denounced the alarming level of unacceptable suffering endured throughout the world by children in conflict (see S/PV.8082). Children become both the victims and the perpetrators of violence. This is one of the most alarming trends in the dynamics of these armed conflicts, a tragic consequence of which is to strips away layers of protection afforded by families, society and law, as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465) rightly notes.

Of course, we welcome the modicum of progress that has been made. The case of the sisterly Republic of Colombia is a striking example. The efforts of Governments, United Nations agencies and civil society institutions cannot be ignored in circumstances that are often extremely difficult. Nevertheless, it is clear that, for the most part, the spiral of horror persisted in 2017 and continues to do so, often with full impunity. At a fundamental level, nothing has really changed since.

Be it in Syria or Yemen, South Sudan or the Central African Republic, Afghanistan or Myanmar, images of destroyed villages, civilian populations caught in the crossfire, bombed schools and hospitals and wounded or dead children lying under the rubble. Such images remind us daily of the bitter truth that war — whether internal, civil, ethnic, interreligious, local or regional — violates all children's rights.

The impact of armed conflict on children must be everyone's concern and everyone's responsibility. We must therefore make the protection of children affected by armed conflict a genuine priority. That demands that all actors of the international community redouble their efforts to translate into real change for those children the good intentions and commitments made in the myriad treaties and resolutions adopted over the past few decades.

Everyone agrees that the issue is a pressing one. Whether victims of war, children of economic migrants, displaced persons or refugees fleeing conflict zones, the tragic plight of children affected by conflict challenges our universal conscience. It is now time for action. It is up to us to ensure that child protection is not merely a slogan, but that it becomes the necessary and indispensable axis of strategies for establishing, consolidating and sustaining the peace championed by the United Nations.

May today's public debate revive the enthusiasm of the Security Council so that it can fully play its irreplaceable role in peacekeeping and sustaining peace, overcome the challenges that too often paralyse its efforts to help children affected by armed conflict, take timely preventive action to protect them from violence and the atrocities of war, and enforce the legal norms ensuring their rights to life, to grow up in the midst of their families and communities, to health, to personality development, and to be loved and protectedn.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): As is evident from the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/465), despite persistent efforts over the past two decades, the rights of millions of children continue to be violated in situations of armed conflict in various parts of the world. Some progress has been made through greater engagement among the United Nations agencies and the Governments concerned, as well as through the integration of children's rights issues in mediation processes. However, much more remains to be done, especially in keeping up with the changing nature of armed conflicts that involve a range of non-State actors. Terrorist entities, including those designated by the Security Council, continue to exploit children as part of their terrorist activities with impunity. The reintegration of children into society after their release and following mediation processes remains an area that needs more focus.

Through its active participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, India continues to contribute to the implementation of the Security Council mandate on this subject. Based on our experience as one of the largest troop-contributing countries, India remains concerned about the lack of resources to implement the provisions of the mandate, including the deployment of more child protection advisers, and to comprehensively address the connection between conflict prevention and the protection of children.

In spite of the clear mandate provided under resolution 1379 (2001), we are disappointed that the report of the Secretary-General includes situations that do not meet the definitions of armed conflict or of threat to the maintenance of international peace and security. We would like to point out such distraction from situations under the mandate of the Security Council needs to be rectified and the mandate strictly adhered to.

While this is an important thematic debate, there has been yet another attempt by a delegation to misuse this forum by referring to situations that are extraneous to the discussion. It referred to a so-called report about the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir — a document reflecting the clear bias of an official who was acting without any mandate whatsoever and relied on unverified sources of information. It is a document that was not even found fit to be considered by the membership of the forum where it was submitted. Such deliberate, self-serving attempts by Pakistan seek to obfuscate the reality of its own use of terror organizations to undermine State sovereignty. They also distract from our discussions of the issues at hand. Such attempts have not succeeded in the past in any forum and will not do so now.

In conclusion, let me reiterate India's strong support for the endeavours of the United Nations to protect children in situation of armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mrs. Malenga (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): First, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July and thank you for your initiative to convene today's debate on the plight of children in armed conflict. I would also like to welcome Ms. Virginia Gamba and express our respect and gratitude for her commitment and dedication to the cause of the world's children. Lastly, I would like to thank His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and all those who spoke before me for their very edifying statements.

The issue of child soldiers is one of the concerns of our Government, which, at the initiative of the Head of State, has decided to ban the recruitment and use of children in our armed forces and security services. To translate that political will into action, the Head of State has established an entity to combat sexual violence and the recruitment and use of children.

We should recall all the legislative and regulatory measures taken to strengthen the fight against the recruitment of children, with a view to providing a better response to the phenomenon and to achieving de-listing. Such measures include various decrees, orders and laws pertaining to, first, the demobilization and reintegration of vulnerable groups existing in the combatant forces; secondly, the establishment of the Interministerial Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration; thirdly, the establishment of the European Union's national programme on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; and fourthly, the protection of children. On 4 October 2012 came the signature of the national action plan to end the recruitment and the use of children in armed conflict and other grave violations of children's rights perpetrated by the security services and the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC).

Undeniable progress has been made in my country's fight to end the recruitment and use of children in the army and intelligence services. Thanks to operational standards that strengthen the verification of identity, between July 2015 and May 2016 it was possible to separate 453 children from among the FARDC recruits, 330 of whom have been reunited with their families. The 123 children separated from the Kamina military have been reunited with their families in the former Kasaï provinces, via the city of Lubumbashi, with logistical support from the Congolese Government and its partners — UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The use of formal and compulsory banking services strengthens such measures. In addition, intensive specialized rehabilitation programmes have been established and buildings constructed with the assistance of the National Institute for Professional Training, with funding from the Government and with Japanese cooperation.

Since de-listing, FARDC has set itself the goal of zero children within its ranks. During recruitment, before recruits are sent to the training centre, they are checked to remove any minors. FARDC works in synergy with protection agencies, UNICEF and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). As part of this fight, during the first quarter of 2018, some activities were conducted with the assistance of child protection partners. A total of 1,500 exit certificates were issued by the European Union's national programme for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and delivered to UNICEF for distribution to its implementation partners. Eight hundred children associated with armed forces or groups have left those groups and are being reintegrated by five UNICEF-funded child protection partners — 70 by ACOPE, 308 by the Association des Jeunes pour le Développement Communautaire, 150 by the Concert d'actions pour jeunes et enfants défavorisés, 125 by leProgramme d'Appui à la lutte contre la Misère and 147 by the Union pour la paix et la promotion des droits de l'enfant au Congo.

Three training workshops on operational standards for child age assessment have been held this year, in Kisangani from 13 to 20 February, in Kitona from 26 to 30 March and in Kinshasa from 21 to 23 March. They were organized for FARDC officers, provincial police officers and members of the security forces, as well as child protection agencies and the Réseau Communautaire de Protection de l'Enfant.

Such activities, conducted with logistical support from MONUSCO, have also made it possible to strengthen the capacities of those involved in protection with regard to various humanitarian rights issues in time of conflict, gender issues, the responsibility of a troop commander, and techniques for protecting children, schools and hospitals. They have bolstered measures to verify the age of FARDC recruits by the Ministry of National Defence and Veterans Reintegration, supported by child protection partners, before recruits enter training centres. Out of 2,850 verified recruits, 70 children have been separated and returned to their communities.

The coordination of actions and activities to foster the DDR of children is done through monthly meetings that bring together the local offices of the European Union's national DDR programme and child protection actors at several levels — at the central level, with UNICEF and partners such as the Réseau des Jeunes et Enfants de la Rue and Save the Children, and the children's DDR focal point; at the ministerial level, with the Joint Technical Working Group; and at local level, with the Child Protection Working Group.

Raising funds for this important component of traditional DDR — DDR children — is vital because a total of 5,331 children under the age of 18 associated with armed forces or groups have already been reunited with their families and are awaiting reintegration into school or training for work. As long as armed groups remain active, the situation will continue. That is why my Government remains determined to continue its efforts to completely neutralize them and put an end to the phenomenon.

I cannot conclude without expressing my country's gratitude to the United Nations and to several international partners who continue to support our efforts in the struggle to end the recruitment and use of children.

The President: The representative of Pakistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Ali (Pakistan): I take the floor to respond to the statement made by the representative of India.

Much though some may believe it, repeating groundless accusations and fabrications do not lend them credibility. At best, they may satisfy a self-delusional notion of reality, but a farce can go only so far. It is unfortunate that the statement made by the representative of India is emblematic of the malaise that the Indian State practises as a virtue. India cannot hide behind false accusations and divert the attention of this body from the real issue. The human rights violations and atrocities committed by the Indian occupying forces against innocent Kashmiri men, women and children are well documented.

The recent report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has completely exposed the real face of India and the human rights abuses it has been committing in the occupied territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The report is a scathing indictment of human rights abuses and the illegal Indian occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. India's brutal occupation of Kashmir has killed more than 100,000 innocent Kashmiris. Today that campaign of brutality continues, including the shooting and blinding of innocent Kashmiri children with pellet guns. Yet, every day, those Kashmiri children, women and young people come out on the streets to demand that India get out occupied Kashmir. We ask that the Security Council act as the world's conscience to ensure that no child is ever blinded again, that no child is tortured and raped again, that no child is pushed to the ground or killed.

Pakistan welcomes the proposal by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a commission of inquiry to conduct an international investigation into human rights violations in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. That proposal is consistent with Pakistan's many calls to that effect since 2016, even as India has continued to ignore legitimate demands for the probe and carry out systematic violations, including the use of pellet guns, excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests and detentions, including of children, and continued sexual violence, under the overall impunity enjoyed by the Indian security forces.

The President: There are no more speakers inscribed on my list. Before we adjourn, I wish to thank the secretariat and interpreters for their hard work and patience during a long day.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.